Interviewee: Glenn Oliver
Interviewer: Thomas Saylor
Date of interview: 27 October, 29 October, and 3 November 2004
Location: by telephone to the Oliver residence in Tacoma, WA
Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, December 2004
Initial editing: Thomas Saylor, January 2005

Glenn Oliver was born 28 Apr 1919 in Brainerd, Minnesota; he grew up in nearby Aitkin, and graduated from Aitkin High School in 1937. Glenn was married in February 1941 (wife Esther).

Glenn joined the National Guard in Brainerd; in early 1941 this unit was activated as part of the US Army. In February 1941, Glenn was on active duty with Company A of the Army's 194th Tank Battalion. This unit was stationed briefly at Fort Lewis, Washington, then in September of 1941 was sent to the Philippines. Glenn was here when Japanese force attacked on 8 December 1941.

Japanese forces quickly defeated the Americans in the Philippines, and Glenn was among the thousands who surrendered in April 1942 at Bataan. Glenn became a POW.

Glenn's POW odyssey, April 1942 – September 1945
(Corroborated through primary sources and other POW accounts)
Bataan Death March, April 1942
Camp O'Donnell, Philippines, April – September 1942
Cabanatuan Camp No. 1, Philippines, September – December 1942
Nichols Field by Manila, December 1942 – September 1944
Bilibid Prison, Manila, September – October 1944
Work camp on Formosa [Taiwan], October 1944 – January 1945
Freighter to Japan (POW transport, *Enoshima Maru*), January – February 1945
Osaka and Maibara, Japan, February – September 1945

After his evacuation from Japan, return to the United States, and reunion with his family, Glenn spent months in military hospitals fully recovering; he was discharged in November 1946 – but called up during the Korean War for active duty, September 1950 – November 1951. Glenn worked many years for American Smelting and Refining Company (ARASCO), retiring in 1982 as Senior Locomotive Engineer.

Glenn Oliver died on 25 November 2012, at age ninety-three.

<u>Interview Key</u>:
T = Thomas Saylor
G = Glenn Oliver
[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation
(***) = words or phrase unclear
NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is 27 October 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project at Concordia University, St. Paul. My name is Thomas Saylor. This evening I'm speaking with Mr. Glenn Oliver by telephone to his home in Tacoma, Washington. First, Mr. Oliver, on the record, thanks very much for taking time this evening to speak with me.

G: You're welcome.

T: For the record, you were born on 28 April 1919 in Brainerd, Minnesota. You graduated from Aitkin High School, class of 1937. You joined the National Guard in Brainerd and in February of 1941 were on active duty with Company A of the 194th Tank Battalion. You were stationed briefly at Fort Lewis and then in September of 1941 by your record, arrived in the Philippine Islands. You spent almost a year in the Philippines, or about nine months, before you were captured by the Japanese. I want to move to April of 1942, after the war had begun in December of 1941, and to your capture by the Japanese. At the time you were captured by the Japanese, Mr. Oliver, in April, what kind of physical condition were you in?

G: Basically, I was in pretty good shape other than I had lost a lot of weight and we were hungry. We were on very short rations. But I had always taken all my quinine prophylaxis for malaria. A lot of the men didn't do that. They would just throw the pills away because you would have reoccurring sweats and chills.

T: From taking the pills.

G: Yes. Very similar to having malaria. At least I did. Lots of times when I'd sleep on the ground or we were under my tank, we wore coveralls…be sopping wet from perspiration. Change clothes or you'd get chills.

T: But by and large you felt yourself to be relatively healthy.

G: Yes. I didn't develop any rashes, skin rashes, or itch or jungle rot. We were able to wash often enough so we'd keep clean and wash our clothes.

T: Now, by your account you had been wounded slightly.

G: Yes. I was wounded January 6 of '42 by shrapnel from a bursting mortar when I was in my tank.

T: How bad was that wound and did it impact you for the long run?

G: No. I was the first one in the tank and I went down into the assistant driver's seat to make room for the other three men coming into the tank. I was looking out the slot. We didn't have periscopes for our tanks. It was just a one-inch high slot four inches wide through the armor plate. You put your forehead up against the hull of the tank and peer out through that slot. The armor plate was probably three-quarters of an inch, maybe an inch thick. But anyway, I heard the mortar shell coming in—it makes kind of a humming sound. I ducked but I didn't duck quick enough, and it burst and a piece of shrapnel came through that little slot and struck me on the top of my head and skidded along on the skull between the skull and the skin on the top of my head. I didn't think too much about it in the excitement. A couple days later I went back to the medics because it wouldn't heal up. They probed it and extracted a little piece of shrapnel and I carried it around for quite a while before I finally lost it.

T: How large a piece was this?

G: It was about, I would say, about maybe three-sixteenths of an inch or a quarter-inch square and maybe a thirty-second of an inch thick. It was large enough so that probably, if I hadn't ducked and it entered my eye, it probably would have killed me. I don't know.

T: By the time early April came around, at the time of the surrender, had you given any thought by that time to the fact that you might be a prisoner?

(1, A, 57)

G: I really can't remember. I suppose we talked about it, because we knew that we were…but we were always optimistic. The word was going around that we were going to be relieved by additional forces coming in. Battleships and everything to relieve us.

T: How much credence do you recall yourself or others giving those kinds of rumors?

G: I don't know. I think we all liked to believe in them, but we really didn't think it was going to occur because of the way things were. We were able to listen to San Francisco on our tank radio. Then, of course, we got the opposite information from Tokyo Rose. She always had very precise information on our operations and named us by our outfit and everything like that. Always asked to surrender and how good we were going to be treated, all that propaganda.

T: When the order came to surrender, what was your reaction to that? How did you internalize the idea that you were going to be a prisoner now?

G: We knew it was going to happen because they had sent us…we received information, the code word that was to be given when we would start destroying our equipment.

T: So you had some advance warning, as it were?

G: Right. We knew it was coming to an end because, I mean, everything was collapsing. The front lines couldn't hold and the Japanese had advanced far enough into Bataan where our artillery couldn't do much damage to them. They were more or less doing whatever they wanted to, at will. We were depending on the Philippine Army and they were inexperienced and not very good soldiers. Due to lack of training. The Philippine scouts were exceptional.

T: But the Philippine Army, as a general army, was not?

G: Right. They had just recently been called up and they weren't trained.

T: Do you remember, at the time of the surrender, being face to face, literally, for the first time with the Japanese?

G: Well, our gang down on Bataan, a number of times I was involved in face to face confrontations with the Japanese. December 26 when I lost my tank. My tank was destroyed by a Japanese thermite device. My driver, Joe Lampkin, and myself—Colonel Miller wanted a couple volunteers to set up a roadblock. We two volunteered to stay with him. We had a couple of tanks and a half-track and went cross country. The half-track was SPM, so that was mechanized…mounted .75 on that. They stayed, and we had the half-track I think too. That was armed. We stayed and got three or four tanks at night. That came down the highway. Then we retreated. That was the night of December 26 of '41.

T: Was it different for you being a prisoner of war now, facing the Japanese face to face in April there?

G: I don't know. We were just doing our job. It bothered me at first to be sitting in a tank and machine gun…Japs...but you get over it and after you…I don't know. You find out what happens to some of your men. That same day we lost the only three men we lost between war and combat, we lost [them] that day and that night. Irv Stroebel was killed with an air burst from a mortar. Matt Harmon on the Agnu River. That night Private August Bender and Gerald Bell were shot. Our company commander, Burke, was wounded and lost that night.

T: So you'd had experience with the Japanese long before early April of 1942.

G; Right.

T: Let me move to April 10 and I'm reading, quoting from your journal entry. It says: "April 10, 1942. We started the march out of Bataan from KP 178.9 and I arrived five days later at San Fernando at KP 64, a distance of 114.9 kilometers or 71.3 miles." When you think back to the five days of the Bataan March over that distance, what remains most strongly in your mind?

G: Well, let's see. I have to look at my—I wanted to see if I told about the first contact with the Japanese when they came through our camp. I wrote in there "178.9." That's where our rear echelon was. Going back to my notes, in my little notebook I wrote down:

> "4/10/42: Jap attack force artillery moved through taking wristwatches, food and so forth, and killed the guy right in front of us. Another Jap. Two others were helping carry him up the trail, supporting him, and one carried his pack and one had his rifle. An officer gave him a command (***). He fell to the ground right in front of me and John Faltoner. He barked some more commands and they dragged him off between us into the jungle where we were sitting. I put my watch underneath my canteen pouch (***) to insulate it, so I kept it for a while. There was one shot, and they came back without him. So that didn't make us feel very good."

And a little further on up the trail there was a kid by the name of Dresser, and he had real thick glasses and they had rings on them almost like looking through the bottom of a Coke bottle or something. When the Japs grabbed them off his face and put them on, he [Japanese soldier] didn't like them, and he threw them down on the ground and stomped on them. Dresser died in prison camp a little later on.

T: Was the behavior of the Japanese or the treatment by the Japanese on that march…did it surprise you, or was it something that you almost expected? How you were treated.

(1, A, 162)

G: No. We expected it. You could see it all the time. I mean, they were killing people…for no reason. It depended on the people. I mean, the deaths. Some of them were pretty good. Others were real rough with you. One place we marched by a schoolhouse, and there was about a quarter of a mile further up the road there was a cane field. We got permission to get a stalk of sugar cane. Evidently they got orders and turned us around. We marched back to the schoolhouse, and they had a big cooking utensils that they used for cooking the rice. Like what they used back in Minnesota to scald their hogs in. When you go to scrape them. About three, three and a half, four feet across and a couple feet deep. Didn't have straight sides. It was for rice, and they gave each one of us a ball of rice. Just handed it to you. They wadded it up into a ball about the size of a baseball and handed it to you, and you got to eat it.

While we were eating it there was quite a bit of shooting up the road, and when we marched back on the road and went by, there was bodies laying out there in the field there. Some [Japanese] officer came along and thought they were trying to escape, and ordered them shot. They were trying to get the sugar cane, the same as we had just a little bit earlier. That was one incident. There were several places on that road where—I didn't see it personally—but the bodies, I saw what was left of the body and clothes of a soldier, and was told that he'd been staggering around. The Jap just grabbed him and jerked him out into the road there and the guy ran over him and killed him. And they just ground him into the road.

T: So the level of violence was something you encountered more than just once. Almost on a regular basis.

G: Oh, yes. I saw a couple other executions. At Nichols Field. When I worked there. I was on that detail twenty-one months. There was an airstrip there, just outside of Manila.

T: Yes. On the march, did you stay together with anybody that you knew from your own unit or were you pretty much on your own?

G: We started out together more or less, but then Mel Hollingsworth and a number of others—I don't remember their names. The individuals. We were carrying another kid that was transferred into our outfit. We were carrying him in a blanket. I had a backpack, and we stopped to rest, and we weren't being pushed by the guards yet because we started out early before they got organized. We were standing up and I had this backpack on, we were sitting down resting, and some guards came along and made Hollingsworth and myself get back in line with the troops that were marching. So we got separated from the rest of them there for quite a while. Hollingsworth and I stayed together most of the time until we got to Camp O'Donnell.

T: How were someone like Hollingsworth and yourself, how were you able to help each other on something like this? During this march.

G: I really don't know. I suppose you just kind of watch each other and give each other…

T: Companionship or…

G: No, more moral support. That wasn't the word I was looking for but, anyway.

(1, A, 231)

T: What kind of shape were you in when you arrived at San Fernando there five days later?

G: Not very good. I'd thrown away my pack. We were dehydrated and footsore. I had a big blister on my foot, on the instep, that was about three inches in diameter. Kind of oval shaped. On my instep. I broke it and drained the water out of it. Luckily I had some clean socks, so I didn't get an infection. Of course we were hungry and dehydrated. [They put us into] another warehouse, [box-like and] metal. Packed in there as tight as you could get. People died in there. We sat there all one afternoon before they let us out.

T: So when you got onto the railroad boxcars which took you away from San Fernando towards Camp O'Donnell you were already weaker than you had been just a week before.

G: Oh, yes. Every day made us weaker.

T: What do you remember about the boxcar journey away from San Fernando there?

G: I really don't remember much. It wasn't very long. Most of us had to stand up. There wasn't room to sit down or lay down or anything like that. We were just packed in there so tight. Then they closed the doors and locked them. I can't remember much about it, other than the relief when we got to camp and they let us out. There was a bunch of Filipinos there. They were hauling a lot of the Filipino soldiers to the prison camp too. We were separated.

Even when we marched. American POWs marched on the left side of the highway, and the Filipinos and civilians that were coming out of Bataan were on the right-hand side. Then the Japanese military traffic would go down through the middle. Sometimes the soldiers in the trucks would lean out over the side and try to whack you with the butt of their rifle. I nearly got hit one time. I ducked, and he missed.

T: At Camp O'Donnell, describe the conditions when you arrived there.

G: It was supposed to be a post for Philippine soldiers. It was in poor shape. It was all huts. There was no adequate water or sanitation. It had one or two half inch iron pipes that ran water, and you had to line up and have a bunch of canteens on a pole and you fill each one.

T: So that was the water supply for the whole camp.

G: Right. And for cooking purposes [we got water from the nearest river]. I happened to get on the water detail, and we had fifty-five gallon drums fastened to two bamboo poles probably three or four inches in diameter. Wired to it. And then you'd get at least four to eight men on each barrel and you had to walk to the nearest river and fill the barrel with water and bring it back to camp for the cooks to cook the rice in.

T: Was that, comparatively speaking, a better detail to be on?

G: I don't know. It was a work detail. You'd be better off if you didn't have any detail *(chuckles)*. That was the only detail I was on that I recall at Camp O'Donnell. I wasn't there very long.

T: By your account it looks like about a month?

G: I don't think I was there that long. I arrived the seventeenth of April. May 3 I left Camp O'Donnell by truck to San Fernando.

T: By your record that you sent to me, the middle of May you arrived by truck at Callanwan, Laguna Province, on a bridge building detail.

G: Right. May 15. But May 8…I didn't put all this…I've got:

> "May 8, '42. We left Camp O'Donnell by truck for San Fernando. May 8 left by truck for Manila. Stayed at Ang Tibay Café. May 15 arrived by truck at Callanwan Laguna Province. Bridge building detail with Captain Wakamori's Combat Engineers. Lt. Colonel Wickert in charge of two hundred American POWs."

T: How did you get on that particular detail? Was it any kind of volunteering or were you simply selected?

G: No. They just…I don't know how…whether the officers selected us or… Because most of these men were from the tank battalions. Colonel Wickert was the commanding officer of the 192nd Tank Battalion, and he was a poor excuse for an officer.

T: That's pretty strong language.

(1, A, 358)

G: Well, it's worse than that. He was a pig.

T: What made him a poor officer?

G: I don't know. I wasn't in his outfit, but every detail he worked on or had charge of he was a bone of contention and even his own men badmouthed him. He certainly didn't perform like an officer. One of his officers, a captain, a man in his own outfit, knocked him in the ditch.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 374.

G: …depending on what they had you doing. Some worked in the river cleaning out debris on the bottom of the river. Others removed damaged structures. Others mixed cement. I was a carpenter, and I worked with a guy that had been wounded

and came back to the outfit. He was kind of a…they left him in charge of doing the posts at the end of the bridge, and then they'd carve them with Japanese characters, words and stuff like that. What I had to do is plane the timbers that he was going to use. It was all made out of mahogany. That's real difficult to plane because the way the grain runs. Then a lot of times you couldn't sharpen the plane. They were Japanese planes, and you had a real soft stone for sharpening them. Like everything else the Japs used, everything was backwards. Instead of pushing on the plane, you'd pull it. Same for the saw. Instead of pushing on the saw, the handsaw to saw, why, you'd pull it.

T: Right.

G: One edge would be for crosscut, another edge, the opposite edge, would be rip.

T: What kind of treatment did you get from the Japanese on this work detail?

G: It wasn't too bad. Like I said, they allowed the Filipinos to come at a break and give plates and stuff to POWs and to the Japanese workers. They worked along with us, of course. We did all the heavy work and dirty work and stuff like that. That's where I got into this captain…and one of his men got into an argument. A special platter of some sweet-type of food and he said, "Set this aside. I'll take this back share it with my officers." Soldier didn't like it, and belted him and knocked him into the ditch, and the Japanese, of course, were a little upset. An enlisted man hitting an officer. Probably in the Japanese army under combat conditions he probably would have been shot.

T: And did the Japanese do anything about it?

G: No. Not that I know of. I mean, we didn't suffer any consequences of the Filipinos giving us food. But this officer was so badly hated that... He was kind of a supervisor. The colonel didn't go out on the job. The captain did. He was down there underneath the bridge yelling at the guys working in the water, telling them how to do it and hurry up and stuff like that. I wasn't on the decking. They were nailing down decking and they used great big spikes. To nail the deck down. The planks. They used sledgehammers to hammer them down. They were at least four to six inches thick or something like that. Nailing them to the stringers and one of the sledge hammers came close to the edge of the bridge. There was no railing. Fell off and just missed this officer. From then on he was pretty careful where he was standing underneath.

T: You mentioned food already once or twice here. Were the Japanese supplying the food or…enough food from your perspective?

G: Well, I don't know. We got rations. I mean, they gave it to our cooks. They had to cook it. I can't remember much about it. I guess we were getting probably an adequate amount of rice at that time. As time went by it got less and less.

T: So you noticed a lessening of the food ration as time went on.

G: And poorer and poorer quality.

T: And poorer quality too?

(1, B, 431)

G: Right. Rat turds in it and full of worms and gravel. Like they swept the bottom of the barge or something.

T: So as conditions got more difficult for the Japanese, that had its effect on you the prisoners as well. By your account here, in September 1942 you returned to Cabanatuan Camp Number One off of this bridge building detail.

G: Yes. September 26.

> "June 26. Moved to Bataan to build a bridge there. July 26, '42. Moved to Candalaria." That was building bridges. "September 25, '42. Detail breaking up and returning to Ang Tibay. Manila. Stay overnight. The next day, September 26, '42 arrived at Camp Number One Cabanatuan. Worked on grave digging burial detail, grass cutting, arm detail one day. One day digging moat. Ration detail. Grave digging, burial, and ration details lasted about one month each. Maybe longer. December 6, '42, went by train with about one hundred men to Nichols Field."

T: The time you spent back at Camp Number One there, the grave digging details sound like it might have been difficult work. Was it?

G: Yes. It was in a way. It was during the rainy season, as I recall. It rained quite a bit, because we'd dig a grave, I would guess probably eight foot in one direction, and we usually buried anywhere between ten and twenty-five people a day.

T: So men were dying at a fairly regular rate here.

G: Yes. It was fairly….some days it would be more than others. But there was always eight, ten to twenty maybe, or something like that. Sometimes we wouldn't dig… We'd dig the grave in the morning, maybe three, four feet and all in one long row—when I was there; I don't know how they did it later on. But anyway, we used short-handled shovels, and we had to dig it one shovel depth deep, and we piled the dirt up on the end. There wasn't room on the side. Oft times, by the time you got down to the depth that you had to dig it you'd be standing in two, three, four inches of fluids and water seeping in from adjacent graves.

Then in the afternoon we'd go back over to the hospital and pick up the bodies. Then you'd have them out on galvanized sheet metal with a bamboo carry

pole on each side, wired onto it. The bodies would be naked. Maybe someone stole the clothing. Nobody got buried in clothes or had any covering. Naked. They'd hose them down, flush them off. A lot of them had running sores, gangrene. Wet beri beri where their legs and thighs, scrotum, swelled real large. Sometimes so large the skin on the legs would split. I've seen them split from the knee to the ankle and the flesh inside would look like a half-ripe watermelon, and then they'd get gangrene and they either had to cut the leg off or they'd die. Most of them just died anyway.

And as soon as we got outside the hospital grounds there onto the main road to go to the cemetery they would let us stop, and we'd pull native grass and we'd make twists of it and put them around the ankles and some on the crotch and some on the face. Keep the flies off the eyes and mouth. Under the arms there by the shoulders, so we wouldn't have to pick them up, touch their skin, to put them in the grave. A lot of time they'd have pellagra, which is where the malnutrition…if you break the skin, the skin was just like…slimy underneath there. Real slick.

We couldn't wash up, so we used the grass…we'd put them in there. (***) grave registration there. A lot of them didn't have dog tags. Sometimes we'd have too many, and we'd have to double-deck them. Lay down one layer and then lay another layer right on top of them and cover them up. You put the dirt on the grave and mounded it up. Then we would go back. Sometimes we had time to have a little service down at the graves. (***)

T: That sounds like a pretty awful detail, and I'm wondering if, as you do that day after day, do you become numb or immune to it?

G: Yes, I guess so. You got to the point where the only thing that bothered me was when a man from my company would be there.

T: But if you didn't know them…

G: [But if I didn't know them] that was different. Just another body.

T: And as you mentioned, there were eight, ten, twelve, twenty of those a day.

G: Right. Every day.

(1, B, 520)

T: Did the pace of men dying slow down or level off after a while?

G: Yes. The weak died first, and as they got more organized—that was after I left the camp—we got better control of sanitation and they were able to also farm gardens and stuff sneaked in. Communications from the Filipinos. Sneaking things in.

T: When you left Cabanatuan Camp Number One you say in your…I'm quoting again: "December 6, 1942. I was drafted on a one hundred man detail and left by train for Manila to work on the Nichols Airfield, making a new runway with pick and shovel."

Were you relieved to be leaving Cabanatuan for somewhere else or were you upset to be leaving?

G: I don't recall. I don't remember how I felt. I think most everybody…well, I don't know. Some people were looking for change. Some wanted to stay in the situation that they were familiar with.

T: That's exactly what I'm getting at, I guess. How do you see yourself as a person? Which one of the two are you?

G: I really don't recall. I think I was satisfied to stay at Cabanatuan, but if you were on the detail, why you went.

T: So there was no volunteering here. You were selected onto it.

G: Some could volunteer. I don't know. I don't recall volunteering for details, but I suppose they put out the word that they needed men for details for this or that. But most of them waited until they were picked. In my case anyway. I can't speak for the others.

T: You were selected.

G: Right. I didn't volunteer.

T: The time you spent on the Nichols Airfield one hundred man detail was the place that you were the longest, until September 1, 1944. Twenty-one months.

G: There were more men there on that detail than just our one hundred.

T: Right. But you were one of one hundred that went at that time.

G: Right. It was already in operation. Had been for some time. We were the five hundred group, and they started out with number one. First man was number one. I think I was 507.

T: When you got to Nichols Airfield, you estimate about five hundred men there?

G: Yes. Probably. I'd say at the schoolhouse there was about twenty rooms in the school, and there was about thirty men to a room and then they had another barracks that we had no access to. I don't know how many were in that.

T: This schoolhouse, is it Basay?

G: P as in Peter. Pasay.

T: Okay. At the Nichols Airfield, what kind of barracks or housing did they have for the POWs?

G: That's where we were. At Pasay schoolhouse.

T: So literally, it was a schoolhouse where you were.

G: Yes. We had to march about three miles to Nichols Field.

T: So three miles up and three miles back on a daily basis.

G: Right. Sometimes they would march us back on Dewey Boulevard, which is a famous boulevard and fronts on the beautiful bay there, Manila Bay, and they'd do that to march us by three embassy building compounds there. There was Norwegian, I think was on the left side, and on the other side of Dewey Boulevard was the Swedish and, I believe, it was the Danish embassies. At the Norwegian embassy one time when we marched by they were supposedly having a tea party or something on the front lawn. There was a woman standing up. They had it all walled in, but then the embassy gates were ornamental iron and you could see through that. There was a woman standing there on a crutch and one leg was missing. And some of the guys recognized her as one of the nurses.

(1, B, 600)

T: American nurse.

G: And we understand that she made it back to the States on an exchange, posing as a Norwegian.

T: Can you talk about the main work detail that you did there? That you were all on at Nichols Airfield. What specifically were you doing?

G: We were making a new runway. At an angle to two of the other runways. I don't know what directions they were running, but it was kind of bisecting the other two runways. They made us run across the main runway to get to the runway we were working on. As I recall, we were making, I think it was five hundred meters wide and I don't know how long we made it. But anyway, we dug it all by hand. Pick and shovel.

We had two railroad tracks. They called them track one and track five. [On] Track one, they had a little gasoline engine that they got from one of the mines, and it ran on narrow gauge track and they pulled a string of like little dump cars. They would have crews fill them up and they'd haul them down to where they make the fill and dump them. Then the guys working on the dump would level off the dump and then they'd push the cars back up to be refilled.

On track five, which I was on, we had three men to a car, and two men would go down with the car full of dirt and they would dump it. Then they'd bring the

empty car back. It had a box on it that you had to fill that was probably five or six feet long and three and a half, maybe four feet wide at the bottom. The box was made so it tapered to the top with handles on each end so you could just pull it off. Then you'd tip the car over to dump the dirt out. Then put the box back on.

The box was, I think it was two boards high, which would be probably about two feet. After Christmas [1942] they made new boxes. Another board on it. Made it a little bit higher, to carry more dirt. We did about six loads in the morning and about five in the afternoon. It seemed like it was about eleven loads a day, and some days we had a lot of derails. It was real difficult to re-rail. It was real heavy. You had to dump it before you could get it back on.

They would punish the whole track crew. You used to line up in groups of one hundred, four wide and twenty-five deep. We had to count off. It would be *(counts in Japanese)*…one, two, three, four, five. Twenty deep. Then they'd go down the other way and count off twenty in Japanese. Anyway, they'd make us open ranks and stand at attention. Then they'd put their arms up in the air, straight up you know, from the shoulder. Put our arms up there [straight up you know, from the shoulder], and the soldiers would whip us with bamboo canes they'd get out of the blacksmith shop. Draw blood out through your clothing. Depending on where you were, sometimes you lucked out, because they'd be real energetic when they started out. If you're a big person, then you'd really get it. But if you're smaller stature or at the end of the session, they were getting tired and not so vigorous. I can remember two times; I only got three stripes.

T: The treatment like that, was that a regular occurrence or was treatment like that something out of the ordinary?

G: It wasn't very common. Like I say, I can only remember…twenty-one months, I can only remember two occasions.

Then of course, one other time they were angry at us because we didn't get out enough work, and they made us work until we got our quota out. It was after dark. They marched us back to Pasay schoolhouse. They rode in trucks and they turned on the headlights, and we had to march between the various trucks.

There were three executions there. One happened before I got there in December. He was beheaded by—the guys called him "White Angel". He was a naval officer. He wore real white whites. The guys wouldn't talk about it.

T: But some happened when you were there as well.

G: Yes. Two of them. They were shot. I don't recall their names. At the end of the shift when we were through digging or working, he climbed up in the latrine and didn't come down. We counted off and he was missing. The Japanese guards went up searching (***). I was number five. They made us sit down facing him.

T: They made you watch this.

G: Oh, yes. (***) between the eyes.

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

G: He shot him. He aimed too high. So close…twenty feet from…(***) standing alongside of me…he shot, and I stepped away a couple feet. When he fired the shot it was high, and it ricocheted, like in the movies you know. The bullet hit a rock (***)…right there.

Another kid was a Mexican kid from New Mexico, and he had cerebral malaria. At lunch time he crawled out into the tall grass, and when we went back to work he was missing. A Jap soldier (***). He always carried a pistol instead of a rifle. He was one of the workers that supervised us over on the track, and he shot him a couple times. He laid there the whole afternoon. When I came at quitting time they made some Americans go over there and dig a grave, a shallow grave. They buried him when he was still alive.

T: He was still alive?

G: Right. A couple days later (***) stones marked where his grave was.

T: The treatment on a daily basis from the Japanese, could you expect to pretty much be left alone by them or were they…were you concerned that they might strike you at any time?

G: You never knew. They were unpredictable. Irrational. I don't know what their psyche was. When our group first got there they all wanted to try out their English on us. Some officer heard them and from then on everything had to be done in Japanese. All orders. Everything. (***). And they all…they were mean. The ones there were all, I think, perverts and they were all small. There was one we called—we had nicknames for them. I think every camp had their Donald Duck, because when they would talk and get excited they'd sound like a duck. But this one really looked like one too. He was short and he had a big nose, thin face, and he had bowlegs so when he walked he looked just like a duck walking. He worked on another track, and the guy that ran the locomotive on that track, kind of a cocky guy, we called him Snafu, which you know stands for…

T: Right. Snafu [military slang: Situation Normal: All Fouled Up].

G: Yes. He overheard somebody calling him Donald Duck, and he wanted to know who called him and why they called him Donald Duck. They told him he was this big movie star. The only problem was a little while after that at the theater he found out who that was. So he got a good beating for it. But he used to get beat anyway. Every time that engine derailed, the Jap would beat the engineer for jumping the track, and he'd beat on Snafu.

T: You know, I'm thinking, the time you were there until September 1944, that by the time you left, that the war had really turned against the Japanese.

G: Oh, yes.

T: Was it possible for you there at Nichols Airfield to get any indication of how the war was going?

G: Yes. We got information. Some of those in my room were old timers in the Philippines. There was one guy, I don't know what his real name was, all we ever called him was Frenchie. He had a way of getting messages and information. I think he was married to a Filipino woman.

T: He was an American though.

G: Yes. He was a sailor. Everybody in that room, first room, was a sailor. In the Navy. I was the only one. I think they got me classified…thought I was in the Navy because of being a tanker. Anyway…

T: So Frenchie was one source of news or rumors.

G: Yes.

T: Did knowing how the war was going help at all with your own morale?

(2, A, 64)

G: Oh, yes. We all knew if we could hang on, why we were going to win. The Japs, when they were going into the New Guineas, once in a while they would show us the newsreels of how they were winning the war and when it turned, then they quit doing that. At the times when they'd lose islands or battles…people came in and sometimes we would talk to some of the guys. In fact, we had one guy there at the last, after we got through building the runway…we built the revetments for the airplanes.

T: Right. Around the outside.

G: Yes. And they were facing different directions. Protect them from being wiped out real easily. He was scared to death. He was a truck driver, Japanese truck driver. Come to find out, one of the guys recognized him. Because he'd been going to college in California and they were both in classes together. I don't know whether he was in ROTC or not. But he knew him. He told this American that the Japanese government had offered to pay his transportation back to Japan to see his ailing grandparents, and when he got back to Japan they put him into the military.

T: So he had told the story of being tricked back to Japan.

G: Right. I think he was in ROTC. To start with. They both were. That's where he recognized him. He said he couldn't wait to get back to America. He hoped to make it. But he said they really treated him rough when he first…beat the hell out of him.

T: On the prisoners there, how would you describe—there at Nichols Field—how would you describe the relations between the prisoners themselves? How did men get along under those kind of conditions?

G: Very good. Everybody was vulnerable. I mean, you left everything out and you couldn't lock it up or anything. Everything was exposed. There was very little stealing. Once in a while one guy would go off the rocker and slip and maybe steal. But that didn't happen very often.

T: Were there little groups of prisoners? I mean, almost cliques in a sense, or did people see themselves as one large group?

G: No. There were lots of…you buddied up with somebody. Usually shared food, because sometimes you'd get seconds, and you'd share. So most of the time it's two men. Maybe three men. Hardly any larger.

T: Was that the case with you too? Did you have a couple people that you were especially good friends with?

G: Yes. We split. In fact, more so after I lost my buddy when the ship went down. We were together all the time at Nichols Field. We worked on the dynamite when they needed dynamite. Some of those hills we made cuts through were as high as thirty-five feet. We dug them down flat. By hand. In a swath five hundred meters wide. I don't remember if it was five hundred meters or five hundred feet. Anyways, wide enough for a runway.

T: Yes.

G: We work off of a bamboo scaffolding. Standing on a plank. I was the front bar man. Walt was the back bar man. Bars were about an inch and a quarter in diameter. Probably ten foot long, maybe a little longer. They'd have a chisel point on each end. The front bar man would guide it and start it in the face, in the rock. It was sandstone. It wasn't a real hard ground or anything like that. Then I had a wooden stake a quarter inch in diameter and (***) meters long and a spoon on the end for mucking out the hole. I had a little pail of water and a small can. I would slosh some water in there and keep pounding away. We had to dig the holes one meter deep and we had to show—we had a guard standing down on the ground or the track. You could shove the stick in all the way so he knew it was deep enough. There would usually be, depending on how much work needed to be done, there would be four or five teams up there. Digging these holes.

T: Did your work differ very much during the time you were there or did you do pretty much the same thing all the time?

(2, A, 144)

G: Pretty much the same thing. Five loads in the morning or six loads in the morning, five in the afternoon. Day after day. Most of the time we worked about twenty-nine days or thirty days and then you'd get a day off.

T: So days off were not a common occurrence.

G: No. Usually once a month. As a noncom you were supposed to get fifteen centavos a day. Which would have been about seven and a half cents. The privates got ten centavos.

T: What good was the money?

G: I always turned mine in. I never got any money. Most times you'd get something out of the Japanese commissary. Lots of time I'd work a whole month and I'd get one Coke.

T: So the money wasn't going very far.

G: Right.

T: Got it.

G: Another time I got a hand of bananas. Philippine bananas are about as big as a man's finger. And there would be about five, seven bananas. You'd work a whole month to get that. One time I got peanuts. I got half a cup, half a canteen cup, of shelled peanuts. So that was your whole month's wages.

T: Essentially you're working for nothing.

G: Right.

T: When you were there at Nichols Field, was it ever attacked by American aircraft?

G: No. Not while we were actually on the field. We had planes fly over. Later on it was attacked, but that was after… The last day we worked there before we were moved to Bilibid…that was a prison…

T: In Manila.

G: Right.

T: Now you mentioned leaving…you were sent there on September 1, 1944.

G: Right.

T: How much advance warning did you have that you were going to be moving away from Nichols Field?

G: None, hardly.

T: And was everybody moved out of there?

G: As far as I know.

T: So really, it was a rather sudden…the Japanese announced you were going to be leaving…

G: Right.

T: Now how far is it from Nichols Field to Manila where Bilibid Prison was?

G: I really don't know.

T: You spent about five weeks there, you mentioned. You spent about five weeks at Bilibid Prison.

G: Right. From August and the month of September and ten days in October.

T: What do you recall about Bilibid Prison? The weeks that you spent there.

(2, A, 185)

G: I met my student officer, Lt. Harold Kostigan, and he had been sent to Davao in Mindanao. They stopped that detail and brought him back to the Philippines and he was at Bilibid. He was more or less useless because he had gone blind from lack of vitamins. He was weak. Discharged and he was legally blind. I read books to him and we talked a lot. He was a great talker. He was Irish.

T: Harold Kostigan was there. Did he stay at Bilibid when you left?

G: Yes. He was there until the end of the war.

T: At Bilibid were there any work details, or were you essentially just held there?

G: As far as I know we were just held there. I don't remember being on any details. There was so many there.

T: So many people there, you mean.

G: Yes. So many POWs there. That was kind of a…they had the regular cadre that took care of everything. They were more or less permanent ones, and we were more or less casuals. I met my buddy that joined up with me when we went from Aitkin to Brainerd to the tank company. It was so crowded he was sleeping in the execution chamber where they executed Philippine prisoners. A little building…

T: So one memory you have is of an overcrowded facility.

G: Yes.

END OF PART I OF INTERVIEW

T: Today is 29 October 2004. This is the planned second part of the telephone interview with Mr. Glenn Oliver of Tacoma, Washington. Mr. Oliver, I'd like to begin when the ship docks there at Takao, and that would be the evening of 28 October 1944. When you got to Takao, you left the destroyer and were put in the control of the Kempeitai, the Japanese military police.

G: We were taken ashore to some building there and questioned. They gave us tea and rice cookies or something. We were questioned. As I recall after being questioned I was taken away and put in prison…I suppose that's what it was. It was a raised platform. Probably ten foot wide. There was an aisle on both sides. They had a guard walking up and down the aisle. He had a cane—not a cane but a stick. Broomstick. The prisoners were confined in a cage on this raised platform. They weren't iron bars. They were just wooden bars about the size of a broomstick. I don't believe the cell was high enough for you to stand up in. There was kind of a mat-like [tatami] on the floor. Then one small space there was a concrete slab with a small rectangular opening in it for defecating and urinating. There must have been a trough underneath that carried the offal to some tank someplace to collect it.

T: How many of you were in that cell?

G: There was one other person but he was—I don't know whether he was Korean or Japanese or what—he was a young Oriental person. He was real upset. He cried a lot. Didn't eat very good. They would shove a box of food into your cell. Wooden box. It had a compartment for rice and one for cucumber, sliced cucumbers or Japanese radish. Then you got a cup of tea and maybe there was some kind of a pickled cherry or something like that. And that was it. He would eat his relishes and leave the rice. I'd take his box of rice and switch with mine because I was starving. Eat his rice. Never complained.

Then he would have…you each had to sit with your legs crossed. That was what you were supposed to do all day long. I tried it and I was too weak and sick. So I laid down and the guard would walk there and he would hit me with his cane, his stick. Poke me with it. Trying to make me sit up. I had my wife's ring on but my

fingers were swollen and he saw it and he wanted it. I told him I couldn't get it off and he gestured that he was going to cut it off. I told him I would scream for the Kempeitai and that kind of scared him off and he left me alone and let me lay on the platform or cell. So I didn't have to sit up.

T: Were you questioned while you were held there for those days?

G: I guess we were questioned that night when we came in. That's all I can remember. I can't remember being asked any other questions. Then it was either that day or the next day we were put on a truck, blindfolded I guess, and taken down to the waterfront and I can remember being on a little boat. Putt, putt, putt. Out to a ship in the harbor. We went up on deck and they put us on the hatch cover for one of the hatches and the Japanese guards were up there. That was where their post was. They could look down into the other holds. There was a bunch of POWs down below.

(2, A, 305)

T: So you knew there were POWs also on the ship.

G: Yes. Because Bartski and Binder recognized some of the men that were doing the cooking up on deck for all the POWs. They gave us extra food up there on the deck. Nobody was to talk to us and we couldn't talk to anybody. Supposedly we would be shot or executed or something.

T: Now, by your own account that you mailed to me, it says: "after a couple of days and nights on the covered hatch we were forced down into a hold crowded with POWs."

G: Yes.

T: So you did leave this place and were then in with the other men?

G: Yes. But evidently they got an alert. They were going to be attacked by American planes. They all fled the harbor. We went out to sea along the coast. Sit out someplace. After a couple days they came back in the harbor and unloaded us and sent us to smaller prison camps.

T: What kind of camp did you end up there on Formosa?

G: It was a pretty nice one. I think it was originally supposed to be a school. There was quite a large grassy area out in front. The buildings looked in real good shape compared to what we had been used to. We had an area for sleeping. It was filled with straw. I suppose it was rice straw or something. I think we were pretty well infested with fleas there.

T: With fleas?

G: Yes.

T: Is that something—bugs, lice or fleas—that you'd had a problem with before this?

G: Right. One area—in the Philippines we had bedbugs. We had fleas there, and then of course, we had body lice. We couldn't get water to clean and wash our clothes. No facilities.

T: How do those body lice bother you? Is it an itching or…

G: It depends on the person. Some people were really bothered, others, it didn't seem to bother them. That was a pastime. You'd get out in the sun. You'd take off your shirt and look in the seams for these little gray backs and you'd squish them between your two thumbnails.

T: So it was a constant though, it sounds like, keeping them under control. Or trying to.

G: Right. And of course, we had to keep our hair cut short. In the Philippines. They didn't seem to enforce it when we got to Formosa and Japan. But there it was colder weather too.

T: So having your hair cut short in the Philippines was a rule, but it sounds like it worked out for the best anyway.

G: Right.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 373.

G: …the Japanese had a hard time differentiating between the Hispanic people and the Filipinos. The Filipinos all had a full head of hair. When they would punish them they would cut their hair. They got caught flashing a V sign at you, they'd take their scissors, or whatever they had, and cut a big V on the top of your head. The Filipinos.

T: Let me ask about the work camp there at Formosa. What kind of work were you doing?

G: I didn't do any work there. I really don't know what they were doing. Mostly, I was too ill. I didn't do any work until a couple months after I got to Japan.

T: Health-wise, what was the matter with you?

G: Malnutrition. Loss of weight. Beri beri real bad. Dry beri beri this time, as opposed to the wet beri beri in the Philippines.

T: How did the dry beri beri affect you?

G: It affects your nerves I guess. And your muscles. Makes you extremely sensitive to any touching or anything—you couldn't stand people to touch you. Even the hair on your legs or something like that. Feel pain.

T: So your clothes, for example, would be painful.

G: I don't know. I can't remember that too much.

T: So you were too ill to go out and work, but you do remember other men going out to work.

G: Oh, yes.

T: Was there a separate barracks, that you recall, for men like yourself that were too ill to work?

G: Not in Formosa. We were treated pretty humanely there. In fact, from what I've heard from other sources, the commander was asked to furnish POWs to work in the sawmill and he wouldn't do it. He thought it was too dangerous. I didn't have anything to write with there. This is from memory.

T: Right.

G: It wasn't until after I got to Japan and after the war I was able to reconstruct what I could remember from what I had written and read about. Read over and over. I had a little vest pocket Bible and I wrote information next to the spine.

T: Right.

G: When we got shook down by the Japs I had to show them the Bible. I'd just open it up loosely and flip it, the pages. They couldn't see that I had written in it.

T: So they couldn't see next to the spine. They couldn't see the…

G: I used a lot of code stuff too. Shorthand. But I knew what it meant.

T: So the time on Formosa is not something that you had a lot of entries about.

G: No. All I did was somebody gave me an old wore out deck of cards and I played Solitaire.

T: So comparatively speaking, the time on Formosa was not the worst time that you spent as a POW.

G: No. It was good except for the lack of food, of course. Everybody was on ration. The sick only got half-rations, as opposed to the workers.

T: What did that mean in real terms? How much food did you get per day?

G: I really can't say. I would say probably (***) and maybe half a canteen cup of rice. It would be lugau in the morning, which is rice that's cooked with lots of water so the rice breaks down and becomes almost like a paste. You could use it to hang wallpaper, I guess. Maybe you get a thin cup of soup. They called it soup. But it was actually just water with a few vegetables or weeds cooked in it.

T: The time you were there on short rations like that, did your health decline further or was it more stable?

(2, B, 427)

G: No. It gradually increased. I gradually increased in weight. At one time that I can remember I think I weighed—there at the school, they had the weight-type scales. They were weighing the kids. I think I weighed eighty-seven pounds.

T: Wow! How much did you weigh when you went into service?

G: Oh, I imagine maybe 145, 150 maybe.

T: So you'd lost about as much as you could lose without…

G: Right. That was about…most everybody had lost weight. Down to the skin and bones situation. Weighed around that area. Bones and skin and internal organs.

T: Earlier when we talked about Cabanatuan, you mentioned that men were dying at a fairly regular pace. Was that the case here on Formosa or had that…

G: No. No. I don't think anybody died in our camp during the few months we were there.

T: So that really stabilized it sounds like. The health conditions.

G: Right. Everybody that was going to die had already died.

T: Moving to the next entry here. January 19, 1945, you state: "our work camp was moved by train to some port on the northern end of Formosa. The next day we went on board another old freighter and down into one of the holds." And it wasn't until

February 11, 1945, that this ship docked at Moji, on Kyushu. You were on board that ship for three weeks and a few days.

G: Yes.

T: What do you recall about that ship journey?

G: When we first went down into the hold of the ship we weren't as crowded as we had been on the other two ships, the *Arisan Maru* and the ship that was in the harbor at Formosa. But we hadn't much more than got down in there and settled down, and the sirens went off and we were attacked by planes. Presumably American planes, I suppose.

T: Probably.

G: Anyway they strafed the ship we were on. We were in the forward hold, and I remember the glass from the bridge being shot out and flying down and smashing on the deck, and then also some of the [life]boats came down into the hold because (***). Some of the men were killed at the back of the hold. I was up in the front, up underneath the wing there. So I was kind of protected. They shot at the planes from the bow towards the stern. After they left, there was a lot of commotion and everybody was shook up. They blew up a tanker out in the harbor, from what we heard, from some of the men that were up on deck. They saw it go.

T: Now, in a sense, you've been through this whole ship thing before. Did that make it more difficult for you to be on board one of these ships again?

G: No. I don't think…it didn't bother me that much. I don't know. Sort of beyond feeling. Anyway, after that air raid, why somebody got a cigarette started, and the next thing I knew everybody that had cigarettes was smoking. One of the Japs looked down in there and saw all these cigarettes glowing and he went bonkers. They wanted to know who had the fire and lit it. Because we weren't supposed to have it. Nobody volunteered, because it meant if we went up there we would probably be killed. Finally, they said if somebody didn't come up they were going to start machine gunning the men in the hold. Willy nilly.

T: Right.

G: Finally somebody volunteered to go up. Somebody that had given up hope anyway. Or real sick or something. Maybe it was the person that really started it. I don't know. It was over on the other side of the ship…of the hold.

T: But somebody did finally step forward or agree to admit to it.

(2, B, 488)

G: Whatever they did up there on top, I don't know.

T: During the journey to Japan was the ship attacked any more?

G: No. Not that we know of. As far as I know. But they hugged the shore, there's a bunch of little islands, and they would…I don't know if they sailed just during the daytime or what. Anyway, we finally made it. We found a place in the hold where they had stored a bunch of canned tomatoes. They were just little cans about half the size of a regular tin can.

T: It was tomatoes?

G: Yes. Canned tomatoes. Part of their [cargo], they were hauling stuff back to Japan.

T: Right.

G: We were able to get into that and we got a lot of tomatoes. I ate tomatoes. Canned tomatoes. Got it right out of the cans.

T: How did you open those cans?

G: All the guys had those GI can openers.

T: The real little ones.

G: Right. In fact, when the Red Cross box…when the Japanese officers inspected the first Red Cross boxes, the rumor was that when he wanted to know what was in each can the American officers had to open it up and show him what it was. He got real interested in the can opener. Finally he picked it up and said to the American officer, "That's going to win the war." American ingenuity. That's the rumor. I don't know…

T: Those are handy little items, those little things.

G: Real compact and easily carried, and very useful.

T: I'm wondering, on the ship, were you together there with anybody that you knew?

G: No.

T: So what about Binder and Brodsky? Where were they?

G: I don't know.

T: You had been separated from them.

G: When the camp broke up I never saw them again. I don't know where they went. I have their stories so I know they…Brodsky I think stayed at a mining camp or something there on Formosa as a medic. I don't know what happened to Binder.

T: So on the ship there heading for Japan, you're not with anybody that you knew.

G: No.

T: In situations like that, is it easy to make new friends or sort of make someone's acquaintance?

G: Well, I think so. Everybody wants to know where you've been, what camps you were in. Did you know so and so. What officers. Trying to piece together what happened to their outfits.

T: That's interesting. So in a way, the couple years that you've been a POW becomes a topic of conversation. Almost, where have you been and who do you know.

(2, B, 531)

G: Yes. What ships you were on. How many people you lost. Things like that.

T: What did you find most difficult about the three weeks on board the ship there?

G: Trying to go to the bathroom, I guess *(chuckles)*.

T: Where were the facilities? Up on top?

G: Yes. You had to climb up a ladder on a steel post in the middle of the…well, it was on the end of the hold. Just rungs. Then they had wooden cages lashed on the outside of the ship. Just boards. Very rudimentary. Just a board to sit on and a little board around you. It was all tied together with rope. You didn't know whether you were going to fall in the sea or not.

T: So you are literally hanging over the side of the ship?

G: Absolutely.

T: I'm trying to envision what that was like.

G: *(Chuckles)*

T: What kind of feeling was that, swaying over the waves?

G: Like going hunting in Minnesota and finding a log to hang over.

T: It also sounds like if you wanted to go to the bathroom you had to leave plenty, or try to leave plenty of time to get up there.

G: Right. Everybody was trying…some made it and some didn't. If you were standing under the ladder, you might be wearing somebody else's.

T: That's a pleasant thought *(both laugh)*. But that's one of the problems, I guess, with weak people with dysentery or diarrhea.

G: Right.

T: When the ship docked at Moji there, February 11, 1945, by your account here, what kind of an impression did the Japanese homeland make?

G: During the daytime, when you did go up on deck to use the facilities, it was real picturesque. These little islands. Maybe an acre or so. With these scraggly trees. Of course, everything was different. To us. Coming out of the tropics.

T: It was February. Was it cold?

G: Yes. When we got to Moji we got there about noon, I think. Between noon and one o'clock, I think. I think there was a clock up there on one of the buildings that we could see. There was a big area there. Blacktop or cement. But it was kind of rough and there were places where the water collected and there was ice. A thin layer of ice on top of the water.

T: What about the clothing that you had? Were you dressed for this?

G: No. I was barefooted.

T: Did they issue you different clothing for the weather?

G: A couple days later. We stayed there from the time they unloaded us, around noon or one o'clock, until about six o'clock. That's on Kyushu Island, and there's straits between Kyushu and Honshu.

T: Right.

G: They took us across, I guess by ferry. I can't remember how we got across. From other readings that I've read, why, it was by ferry. Then we got on a train, and that was pretty good. It was real crowded. It was just for POWs, at least the part we were in. I got up in the baggage area and laid down in there. I had no room.

(2, B, 585)

T: From when you got off at Moji, crossing the Shimonoseki Strait there, across to Honshu Island, the big island, did you see or encounter Japanese civilians at all?

G: I don't remember. I don't remember. I don't know. For some reason, lots of where I was and what I did are absolutely blank. I have no recollection. I don't know why.

T: You do indicate here that the train journey—and can you recall was the group of POWs that came off the ship, do you remember, all going onto this train or were you broken into groups?

G: That I don't know. The car, railroad car I was in, was all POWs. They stopped at a small…at someplace—they had all the shades pulled down. We were warned not to look out, but we did. Every town we went to there was nothing but burned out…

T: So you could see the effects of American bombing on the cities you were going through.

G: Right.

T: Your train journey ended at the city of Osaka.

G: Yes.

T: Describe, if you can, getting off the train and where you ended up, because it was another schoolhouse, it looks like.

G: Yes. We called it Wakahama House, or Wakayama House. It was a three or four story building with individual rooms. Each room had a raised platform with mats in there, to sleep on.

T: The tatami mats?

G: Yes. They gave each person four, kind of thick, cotton blankets.

T: Were prisoners were sleeping in individual rooms here?

G: No. There would be a whole bunch in one room.

T: But not everybody in a large hall. There were rooms with numbers of prisoners in each room.

G: Yes. Probably twenty, twenty-five maybe. I don't know.

T: So a larger group.

G: Right.

T: Now your account also says it was a number of weeks still until you were able to go to work.

G: Right.

T: Those weeks that you weren't able to work, did you stay pretty much in the schoolhouse or in your room there?

G: You had to. Yes. And you got less rations. Then I had dry beri beri, and the Japanese medic was in the room upstairs. I had to go up the stairs and report to him. He'd scold me and yell at me. Make fun. Then he gave me a pill. I don't know what it was. It was supposed to be a sleeping pill. I had problems keeping other guys awake.

T: Was that due to the dry beri beri? The effects of that?

G: Yes.

T: That stayed with you quite a while.

G: Yes. I think that maybe it had vitamins in it. Maybe a narcotic. Pain killer. Sleeping pill. It was quite large. It had kind of a white coating on it.

T: There in Japan, when you were at Osaka, did you witness or experience any physical abuse of the prisoners by the Japanese guards?

(2, B, 648)

G: No. Not really. I never saw anybody get hit, at least real hard, until there at Maibara. There we had a couple of Mexican kids whipped for stealing tomatoes.

T: That's the place you went in May, right?

G: That's correct.

T: Can you talk about the work you did here? You mentioned that you were with "Three other men and I were part of group of forty that were to work for the Kami-Gumi stevedoring company."

G: Yes.

T: Was that in Osaka there?

G: Yes. No. I think it was…well, it's outskirts of Osaka. I think the area is probably called (***). Anyway, it was down on the waterfront, and they had a bunch of warehouses down there. We worked on the pumper, to pump the sump pump underneath the (***) building.

T: Was that heavy work or light work?

G: It was pretty heavy for us, to start with. It was considered light work. That's why we were on it. They had four of us on it. Two men on each end. Pushed down one end and the other end would go up, and then they would push down. That would pump water. It had like the size of a fire hose running down into the pit where the water collected at night from the bay. We pumped it out in the street there.

T: Now, was this just POWs working here or did you have Japanese working here too?

G: It was a combination. It was a bunch of the longshoremen [who] were Japanese civilians. I guess they were civilians. Japanese. They were Oriental, anyway. They had the free run of everything. They'd [guards] march us in there in the morning and turn us over to them and then they'd take off. There would be no guards around that I remember. They would divide the men into different work groups, and off we'd go.

T: What kind of treatment did you get from the Japanese civilians working there?

G: The ones working there were pretty lenient. I mean, they didn't bother us. As long as you didn't do any damage, try to sabotage… You did get chewed out for stealing nutmeg. They told us that was no good. That was our interpretation. But they said, that's medicine. We'd grate it up for seasoning. So we had to be real careful.

T: How did you get to work each day?

G: Walked.

T: You had to walk from the schoolhouse to the work place.

G: Yes.

T: Did you walk through any civilians areas?

G: Oh, yes. Yes.

T: So you could see the civilians and they could see you.

G: Right. I remember little kids came out and throw…some would throw horse manure at you. That was all right until one of them happened to hit a guard. They growled and scolded them, and that stopped that.

T: So you had a guard walking you to work really.

G: Oh, yes.

(2, B, 722)

T: Was it scary to have those civilians sort of there or not? As you were walking.

G: Never bothered me. Most of them kept to themselves. One time you had to walk by a bathhouse, and two sections—one for women and one for men. I remember seeing a Jap man walking over to the bathhouse bare naked except for a towel that he held in front of his crotch. He had on a pair of sandals.

T: From where you were in Osaka there—and you were there in February, March, April, and part of May—could you see or hear the city being bombed by American planes?

G: We went through that bad air raid in January where the American bombers firebombed Osaka. We saw B-29s.

T: So you could see them from where you were?

G: Oh, yes. They made some of the, made a bunch of POWs go up on top of the roof…

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A begins at counter 000.

G: …but part of the city they were attacking was farther away from us. They'd circle around and around and you could just see them in the searchlights. Because it was low level attack. I think it was ten thousand feet.

T: Yes. The incendiary raids, they bombed at low altitudes so it would make it easier for you to see them. Did you find yourself worrying that your location would also be bombed?

G: That's a possibility, but we didn't think we would. From the construction of the buildings around there. They bombed the waterfront pretty bad. Some parts of the warehouse had been damaged and broke open. There was a lot of stuff just laying around. They didn't try to salvage it. Some of the barrels were full of liquid. That's where we'd clean our hands. Break the skin on top. The air would make it congeal. You could break the skin and there would be liquid underneath. You'd get that on your hands and you'd rub your hands in it and it would take off the dirt and the hair.

The easiest way to clean. We got corn. We roasted that in a towel which we salvaged from burned out buildings. Bombed buildings.

T: So you could see quite clearly the effects of these incendiary raids on Osaka.

G: Yes.

T: You mentioned in your account here that your duty changed. It says: "after the surrender of Germany"—that would be the beginning of May—"the Japs opened up a warehouse that had a large supply of bags of some kind of fertilizer belonging to the Germans." Describe the kind of work you were doing when you moved to this location.

G: We were still at Wakahama House, doing stevedoring.

T: But you were just doing a different type of work.

G: Every day. Yes. Some days we'd be unloading railroad cars of steel where they stamped out metal for shells. Other times it would be defective shells. Empty shell casings. Maybe they had been already fired and salvaged and sent back to be reprocessed or something. Or it would be black…like sand. Some of the guys knew what it was. They called it spice. It's a metallic, partially processed metal. Before they'd smelt it. And we'd unload railroad cars of that. Usually that was wheeled and dumped into barges that would be parked underneath a ramp where we'd run out there with the container on wheels and dump it into the barge.

T: So mostly loading and unloading of a variety of things.

G: Yes. Bales of cotton. One little Jap, I don't think he weighed over one hundred pounds, maybe 110 pounds. He looked like he was about seventy years old. During a break he picked up…he took his koobies, that's sack hooks, and chucked them into a bale of cotton. Each one was stenciled with the weight. It was a little over five hundred pounds. He took that on his back and walked the length of the warehouse. But he couldn't put it up on the wagon. An American reached down and pulled it up and stashed it on the wagon to be hauled away.

(3, A, 42)

T: Doing heavier work like this, heavier lifting, had your health improved to the point where you could do this fairly okay?

G: We used like a loader with wheels on it. But he was just showing how strong he was.

T: So you had some Japanese working, doing the same basic thing you were doing.

G: Right.

T: Did they keep you separate from each other or did you kind of work side by side?

G: We worked together. This German warehouse was…after Germany surrendered…this fertilizer belonged to the Germans, from what we were able to find out, and the Japanese were shipping it out to be used for their purposes. To load it, we would walk out of the warehouse and up little ramps in the boxcar and stack it in the end of the boxcar. The sacks were stenciled 120 kilos.

T: That's 264 pounds then. That's a heavy bag.

G: Right. I dropped one bag. My ankle would pop and you didn't have to carry very many, because those boxcars were small and you had fifteen, twenty men carrying and a loader would stand above and put the sack down on your shoulders.

T: So it made it a little easier it sounds like.

G: Right.

T: What prompted the move out of this location? Because by your record, on 20 May 1945: "I was in a detail of two hundred men that went by train to Maibara about halfway between Osaka and Tokyo to a new work camp." Had you been given any advance warning that this move was going to take place?

G: No. The officers picked out the men to go there. It's a very diverse group. There was Australians. There was Dutch, English. In fact, the officer in charge of our detail was a Major McLaughlin from England.

T: So no longer all Americans.

G: No. I've got a roster of every man in that camp. I made up the roster and I had each man sign it. Most of them I've got their serial number, the outfit they were in, and their last known address. Then they'd sign it. I wrote this for the major. I wrote it in pencil, and it was done in 1945.

T: So you took it upon yourself to sort of keep a record of who was there.

G: Yes. Well, one of them. I had this record. He was F. E. McLaughlin c/o Mssrs. Henry and Gunde Ltd., Birmingham. 51 Parliament Street, London. Then there's some numbers there and he signed it at the bottom. F. E. McLaughlin and Major. I guess that's his serial number.

T: Now, from your perspective, how well did men of different nationalities get on with each other?

G: Pretty good. We had Navy men, we had Army. Some of the Air services. We had civilians. Scots and a lot of New Mexicans. Mixed group. Heritage.

T: Did people tend to, from what you remember, stick to their own? Americans with Americans, British with British?

G: Yes. The Mexicans, they'd choose sleeping areas close to each other because they talked more Spanish than English. Australians were kind of…stayed by themselves. But it didn't make much difference. Everybody was jammed up. I mean, you had about three foot area of space. That was it.

(3, A, 102)

T: So at Maibara, the work camp, were you kept in one building all together?

G: Yes. We had one building with the sleeping platforms. I think there was a sleeping platform on both sides of the building with an aisle down the middle. There was a door on each end. One end you went out to go past the guards. They had four guards sitting at the front gate. The whole compound was walled in by tall boards, solid, so you couldn't see out. The other end led to the kitchen; a gravel path about forty feet that led to a small cook shack.

T: Who did the cooking? The prisoners?

G: Yes.

T: How was the cook team selected?

G: I don't know how they did…whether it was from past experience or favoritism or…I really don't know.

T: Were you ever on the cook team?

G: No. I had to carry rations.

T: Were the rations carried from the cook shack to the barracks?

G: No. Well, yes. For eating. But I was never involved in any of the distribution. I was talking about rations. We had to carry those from the warehouse to the kitchen.

T: And where was this?

G: That was at Cabanatuan.

T: Thinking of Maibara now, how was the food distributed? Was one person or several people in charge of giving out the portions?

G: I really don't know. I can't remember. Whether they were in groups to be fed or…however they did it, it was done real fairly because everybody kept an eye on the server, and if there were leftovers, they were rotated. When your number came up you got a portion.

T: So from your perspective, you feel that the divvying up of the food was done fairly.

G: Yes. Of course there was some favoritism. Some place along the line there usually is. The cooks got first cut.

T: So it was a good deal to be on the cook team.

G: Yes. I would think so. But also it was hard work too, because they had to get up, I suppose, about four o'clock in the morning to build fires and start washing rice and cooking it so it would be ready for us at six, six thirty or something like that.

T: Let me ask you about the work you were doing here.

G: Originally we were to extend the canal that they were building. It started at Lake Biwa and went through the countryside there. I don't know if there was another little lake or whether it was a bay. Lake Biwa. I'm not sure what it was.

T: Was it physical work?

G: Yes. We were digging the canal. Extending it to the water. We had to dig it…the bottom, I suppose, was about maybe five feet across at the bottom and then sloped up both sides. We had to haul the dirt up and pile it up on each side. Used that for one of the walkways on top. And up at the other end of the—later on in the summer—we were at the other end of the canal where Lake Biwa was. Had four big electric water pumps there where they pumped the water back into Lake Biwa. The idea was they wanted to drain this bay, I think, so they could plant rice there.

(3, A, 162)

T: Did you go to work every day or were there regular days off?

G: I think there may have been a day off every ten days or something like that. I really can't remember.

T: And the work was pretty consistent as far as doing the same thing every day?

G: To start with. When we first started work there. Sometimes there, the first part of May when we started there, there would be a little ice on the top of the water and you had to get down in the water there. Maybe halfway between your knees and

your waist. And of course, there was mud. You're digging with a shovel and one guy would dig and you had two men with a woven basket and you threw the mud in that basket. When it was loaded up, then they'd crawl out of the canal and dump it and come back and you refilled it.

T: It sounds like physically exhausting work.

G: Not only that, it was cold. Then you're dirty. When we were done they'd let us go in the lake and wash off. The mud. That was the only way we could wash.

We found clams in the bottom of the lake.

T: Clams in the lake?

G: Yes. That's the ones that have those—in Lake Biwa—pearls in them. Maybe. The ones we found. Maybe there would be one pearl in maybe two, three hundred clams that didn't have them. They'd let us dig in the bottom of the lake. You could feel them with your feet or hands. We'd pull them out. They were big.

T: And you could eat those.

G: Yes. So that's what we were doing, is using them to eat. Cook them. Some would find those little Biwa pearls in them. Some would collect them. I used to trade mine for rice.

T: That's interesting. Trading pearls for rice.

G: Yes *(chuckles)*. They were all irregular and that didn't really appeal to me. Some of the native men were piercing their ears with these bamboo splinters and using the mucous from the clam to glue the pearl on the end of it. In the lobe of their ears. Kind of a fad.

T: No kidding. One would think that fashion and fads wouldn't come to prison camp, but it does.

G: Yes. Tattoos.

T: One thing I'm curious about. You were here after May 1945. The war continues to go badly for the Japanese. You can see the damage in Osaka and elsewhere. Did you begin to worry, either yourself or did men around you start talking about what might happen to you if the Japanese lost?

G: Well, we didn't know it at the time, but there was a document out, of which I have a copy right here, where we were all to be executed if they invaded Japan.

T: That surfaced after the war. That's right. I'm wondering if there were rumors among the men while you there of what might happen.

G: I don't know. I don't recall any in our camp. There may have been. I don't know. Maybe at some of the more serious thinking people might have wondered about what was going to happen.

T: Were you a serious thinking person? To use your phrase.

G: No. I was just trying to survive.

T: What does that mean for how you approach kind of daily life as a POW?

G: Well, I tried to keep my distance from the Japanese, because it seemed like those that cottoned up to the Japanese eventually wound up getting severely punished or misunderstood and were beaten or whatever.

(3, A, 224)

T: So you kept your distance? Were you a person who thought about the future, or focused more on just every day?

G: Just the daily living. Something to eat, and I buddied up with two other men and we shared our food. We caught frogs when we were planting rice and we'd smash them with rocks at lunch time. We had a piece of galvanized tin to cook them on. We tried cleaning them at first. It was just a little green frog. Three inches long. Something like that. We'd just bang them together. Two rocks together on one and crush them. Then we'd fry them up that way. Didn't clean them or anything. Ate the whole thing.

T: You'd been buddied up with different people over the last couple years now. Who was it by now?

G: Chuck Naslund, who was a corporal with the 4th Marines. He came out of Shanghai. He was over there in Shanghai in the Hennessey Guard, I guess. When the war started they brought him over to the Philippines. And Glen Wilkinson, who was a staff sergeant in the Air Force, a noncom.

T: Had you known either of these guys before you got there?

G: No.

T: So once again, you just sort of make friends with people.

G: Yes. They picked me up in Osaka. We got together there. It was so cold most everybody buddied up with another person. You take four of your blankets. Each person had four blankets. We'd put four down underneath us and then we'd have

four to put on top of us. Then if you had any extra outer clothing, you'd pile that on top.

T: So it sounds like you were cold all the time.

G: We were. If you had water in the room it would freeze at night.

T: So no heat in the rooms.

You were on a rice planting detail, you say, when the war ended. How did you experience or hear about the end of the war?

G: This major evidently was able to read Japanese. I didn't know about it. Maybe someone knew.

T: This British major.

G: Yes. He had to send some of the weaker people over to the building there, right across from the guard shack at the main gate. That was the Japanese officers' quarters. He'd get a Japanese newspaper every once in a while. He'd go over there and clean out his office. Sweep the floor and things like that. He'd sweep the paper out and give it to the major and the major would read it—was able to decipher enough so that we knew how the war was going. I don't think anybody in our camp had a radio receiver. Some of the larger camps were able to smuggle in enough parts to make a basic receiver.

T: But from your recollection there wasn't one at the camp you were at.

G: No. So when the war ended, the Japanese came in themselves. I think it was August 15. The last day. At noontime when we were just getting ready to fry up some frogs, the Japanese person from the camp came out there and he was just about ready to drop. He had run all the way. A couple miles. He went to the Japanese in charge. Then they gathered us all up and tried to make us run and get back to camp. We wouldn't run.

T: Did they tell you while you were out there on the detail, or did they just tell you to go back to camp?

G: They didn't tell us anything. They just wanted us to go back to camp. We went back to camp and the next day they didn't take us out to work, and by that time we were pretty sure the war was over with.

T: So rumors were circulating around about what this meant.

G: Right. Then the major came in and gave the two Mexican kids that he had whipped for stealing his tomatoes, gave them a bottle of sake and bunch of Japanese

seaweed candy and some other stuff and told them not to be angry with him. He said Japan had given up the hand and the war was over and we were all friends now.

(3, A, 315)

T: Can you remember your own emotions when you learned that the war was really over?

G: Well, of course, I was real thankful. The guys went over to the guard shack there, and the four guys, the Jap soldiers in there sitting on their chairs, each one with a rifle and bayonet on there, told them the war was over, got their rifles. The one guard had been real mean. He always whacked you in the back with his [rifle] butt when you were lined up and marching someplace. He ran out the gate and we never saw him again. Put the others to work and we knocked down the walls all around the compound and we had orders to put POW on the top of our barracks in big letters. We waited, and we didn't get spotted.

T: You talked about a very interesting experience for yourself, Sergeant Glen Tokington, and Corporal Naslund, that the three of you took it upon yourself to leave the camp.

G: Yes. Everybody was traveling around. We had guys come to visit our camp. That's where we got the idea. Nobody bothered me. Just get on the train and go wherever you want.

T: Were you intimidated at all or scared to leave the camp and be out there with Japanese civilians?

G: No. Because we learned that the Japanese emperor had told the civilians that they were not to retaliate and harm anybody. That's the way they were. It's a wonder that (***).

T: The Japanese, the guards in the camp then, when the war was over, basically they were put to work or they disappeared.

G: Yes. Those that had been real abusive took off. The rest of them, they put them to work.

End of Tape 3, Side A. Side B begins at counter 379.

T: [Talk about] the trip that the three of you undertook, because it's an interesting journey. Did you have a plan when you left the camp of where you were going to go?

G: Yes. We wanted to go back to Osaka because we knew that was a big name camp and we knew that they would be able to get us in contact with the military to locate

our small little camp that was at the base of the mountain there. You couldn't hardly see it.

T: Was the reason to go back to the camp at Osaka, because it was larger?

G: Yes. It was one of the main camps in Osaka. Yes.

T: Interestingly…can you talk about the trip you took on the passenger train to Osaka? Just the three of you, right?

G: Right. We went down to—walked downtown and went to the railroad station. They wanted us to buy tickets, and we said no. They have turnstiles there that you go through to get to the rest of the platform, so we ducked under them and walked out to the platform and there was a train sitting there. It was going the right direction so we went down and got on it. There were Japs all over the engine, riding on the sideboards there and hanging on the steps. It was a passenger train—at least as far as we went in. There was one full of vegetables. They were standing on the steps and in between the cars where they were coupled together.

T: So it was very crowded.

G: Right. And they acted like we were lepers or something. They'd back up and make room for us. I think I was in the lead and walked down the aisle and I was looking for a place to sit. No way you're going to sit because they were standing…the aisle was so full. Couldn't hardly get through. They'd crowd away from you and let you by. The seats face each other. (***) motioned to them to get out. We just went in there and we had two seats facing each other. One of them sat next to me and another guy sat on the other seat. I had a piece of rope for a belt to keep my pants up.

T: So you're still wearing the clothes you had on when you were a prisoner.

(3, B, 418)

G: Right. That's all we had. The aisle was full of soldiers of different ranks. Some with guns. Some with sabres.

T: How did you figure out where to get off or that you were on the right train?

G: We sat there for a while and pretty soon a civilian worked his way up through the aisle where we were. We could tell he was a civilian because they all wore these Japanese army caps, but the civilians didn't have a star on the crown that the military wore. A star.

T: So you could immediately identify him as a civilian.

G: Yes. Otherwise he looked just like a soldier. He didn't have any side arms or any [other weapons]. He bowed two, three times and could speak good English. He wanted to know if he could help us. He wanted to know where we wanted to go. We told him we wanted to go to Osaka. He said you're on the right train for that. We told him we wanted to go to Wakahama House. He said I'll help you find the right street to go there. So we let him sit with us. The four of us sat in the two seats.

T: Did you talk with him very much?

G: I suppose we did. I don't know. I don't remember any of the conversation. When we got to Osaka he helped us through the railroad station and out onto the main street. The streetcars that run by there. Big double tracks. Big wide street. He picked out the right streetcar and put us on it and that's the last we saw of him.

T: So here you are. You've navigated the train system and you're on a streetcar heading back to a place that you know.

G: Yes. As we were going down the street toward Wakahama House—he told us about how far it would be. I don't remember how many miles. It may have been two miles. Anyway, a lot of the passengers do a lot of jabbering. Real excited. They were looking out the right side of the streetcar. We could hear them talking *(speaks Japanese)* about the B-29s.

T: So they could hear or see them?

G: They could see them. I couldn't see them from where I was. But I could hear them talking about B-29s. About that time we could see the schoolhouse up ahead of us and there's an overpass that goes kind of diagonally over the top of the street. Up high. When we got there, the streetcar stopped underneath there and there was a wagon alongside of us. A rubber-tired wagon pulled by one horse. Moving stuff around the town. I looked, and the first B-29 I saw was coming down real slow. Real low. I could see up into the bomb bay. There was some GIs. It looked like they had some strap or tether or something tied to them and they were shoving shoes out of the bomb bay. Just land down in the street.

T: Shoes?

G: GI shoes. They were tied together. Some of the wiring along the street got torn down. It was so heavy with shoes. They were just shoving them out. Pairs of them. The next one came by. Looked back there and you could see—it seemed like an odd number—five, seven or nine, something like that, B-29s. In a row. Coming down the street. When they got there by Wakahama House they started dumping cargo out. They were high enough so they were using parachutes. The next thing we knew a pallet loaded with…no, it was a fifty-five gallon drum with a parachute tied to it…the parachute didn't open. It came down and hit that horse.

T: The one pulling the wagon.

G: Yes. Right. The wagon was under the bridge but the horse was kind of sticking out the other side. It killed the horse, and the barrel split open and it was full of gallon cans of canned peaches.

Wakahama House was for English and Australian POWs. Then they moved the Americans out. They had a bunch of Japanese rounded up and they were making them pack stuff that they could salvage into Wakahama House. Then they dumped some more pallets of clothing and food. K rations and all kinds of stuff. Medicine. After they left, we jumped off the streetcar there and ran over about half a block to Wakahama House. Went in there. There was a Jap hanging in the entrance way by his feet. Somebody had cut his throat. I looked at him and I figured out it was the medic that used to chew me out.

(3, B, 490)

T: The one when you had dry beri beri there.

G: Right. I asked one of the POWs there and said what happened to him? He said we gave him the job of emptying the *benjo* buckets, and he tried to take off and they caught him and brought him back and cut his throat. He was still hanging there. So we went upstairs, up to the room up there with the radio, and contacted (***) and told them where the camp was.

T: Oh! Maybe they didn't know about that location.

G: They didn't. They hadn't been able to locate it yet even though we had POW on the roof. Maybe they would have eventually, but we didn't want to wait. Anyway, we got quicker action. So we went down and we got food, K rations, and we all got clothing. Trousers—most of them were too long. We got shoes. Socks and underwear, shirt and trousers. (***) down the street to the railroad station. Got on the train and started back up to Maibara.

T: So you went to Osaka and then went back again? To Maibara.

G: Right. The next day a plane off the [American aircraft carrier] *Bonhomme Richard.* Flew over us. Our barracks. He threw out a little canister of food. I saw it come down. Brass or aluminum. I suppose it was aluminum. With a little silk parachute on it. There was a note. It said something about congratulations and welcome back. Stand by for further air drops later on. He flew around a couple times. Came back and the hatch was open. Slide it back. He came towards us and he heaved a big canned ham…

T: A can of ham?

G: Yes. Didn't know what it was until after it landed and stopped skidding. Went through the roof at the other end of the barracks. (***) about the middle of the barracks from the front. One end to the other. It was on the far end. Close to the kitchen. It went through the roof, through the back wall of the barracks and hit the path there and skidded along the gravel. Stopped skidding just about in front of the kitchen. It was pretty badly beat up. But we salvaged it. We had ham that night with our rice.

T: By your account here, it wasn't until September 10 that you actually left.

G: Right.

T: And you also mention that your health was not good again.

G: Right. I was getting sick. I didn't know what was the matter with me. I was just nauseated. I thought maybe it was the rich food or…didn't know what it was. Later I found out it was hepatitis.

T: How long before they diagnosed that?

G: I really don't know whether it was after I got to the Philippines or whether it was after I got back to the States. I was in the Madigan Hospital for practically nine months.

T: Where is Madigan Hospital? In Washington?

G: Yes. Part of Fort Lewis. The reservation. Adjacent to it.

T: By your account here, it was September 11, 1945, you went on board the USS *Goodhue*. September 17, arrived in Manila, and after several weeks were put on the USS *Tyron* and then shipped back to the United States. I want to move to that part of your experience now. While you were in the Philippines or on the ship back to the States, what kind of debriefing or any kind of counseling did you get from military or military physicians?

(3, B, 555)

G: I can't remember any. On the ship from the Philippines…Japan, I mean, to the Philippines, somebody knew about me. I was asked to go to an area in the ship, the dining room I think it was. There were quite a few tables in there…and talk to a bunch of officers about the *Arisan Maru*. Later, the company commander back in Minnesota (***) had me brought to his quarters and an observer guided me down there and we talked for a while.

T: Was that more a conversation or did he want some information from you?

G: He wanted to know what I knew. He was out of contact or touch…he wanted to know about as many men from Brainerd as he could. It was a long time regiment from Brainerd and he had several officers from Brainerd in this outfit. Most of the men he knew either personally or…

T: Sure. And he thought you might know about some of those men.

G: I did give him information on some that he wouldn't have known. Like in Cabanatuan when I was on the burial detail.

T: Was the *Arisan Maru* something that military was anxious to know about? What your experience had been on that.

G: No. Not that I recollect.

T: And once you got back to the States, you spent all those months at Madigan Hospital.

G: They gave me a furlough to go back to Minnesota. I was there for a couple months.

T: At this time was your wife out in Washington or was she here in Minnesota?

G: She was here, in Washington. She came out to Washington. She had gone back to Minnesota after the war started. She went back there. (***) When I got to the Philippines the Red Cross contacted her and my parents and let them know I was in transit.

T: So they knew you were coming.

G: My parents were…

T: So when you got back to Washington, both your wife and your folks were there. That's the next thing I wanted to ask you about. When you saw your wife, Esther, and you saw your folks, how much did they want to know about your POW experience?

G: I can't remember. My dad was hard of hearing and my mother…I suppose they were all concerned. They were more interested in my just being back and trying to get caught up on things here in America. I'd been gone for four years.

T: You'd been gone for four years. That's right. So you remember more the conversations being about what was happening and what had happened in the States as opposed to talking about what had happened to you as a POW.

G: I told them some. They all were aware of…I don't think they probably knew how awful it was. I suppose I soft-coated some of it too. We got caught up on birthdays and Christmases.

T: So when you talked about the POW experience, I think I hear you saying, you almost told them a censored version of it.

G: Yes. I don't think…I can't remember talking so much about it as I do now.

T: As 1945 and 1946 went along, was it something that came out that was more a topic of conversation at home or not really?

G: No. I don't think so. Esther and I just picked up our life and enjoyed every bit of it. I was still with the military until I got my discharge on November 11, 1946.

(3, B, 632)

T: So you were in the service for well over a year after you got back from prison camp.

G: Yes.

T: And a number of those months were in hospital though or connected to the hospital.

G: Yes.

T: What kind of physical effects did you notice when you were in hospital all those months? What did they keep you there for?

G: Basically it was for hepatitis.

T: That took a while to get cleared up.

G: Healed my liver. It was infected. In fact, one time they told me that seven-eighths of it had been damaged, but they said you only need one-eighth to survive. It's one of the few organs that will eventually heal itself. Regenerate itself.

T: Have you had problems since your discharge with you liver or is that something that essentially did take care of itself?

G: It took care of itself. It gradually got softer. It used to be real hard. They always told me that if I wanted to see any children I would—if I was a drinking man—they said not to drink. So I never did.

T: Because of your liver. Sure.

G: Never drank beer or liquor of any kind. I tried it when I was young, but I didn't really like it that much. I had a couple scares driving, so it's a good thing I didn't.

T: So drinking when you came back from overseas—a number of guys talk about drinking heavily—that wasn't something that you did.

G: No. Didn't touch it. Not even a beer. In fact, in the Philippines when I finished one bridge, it was near the (***) brewery and the Japanese raided it and they gave everybody that worked on the bridge a bottle of beer. I made arrangements for another guy—we all had to stand at attention on the bridge and drink our bottle of beer.

T: Standing at attention?

G: Yes. More or less. In ranks. I made arrangements with the guy next to me to give him my beer for a ration of rice.

T: So you really weren't a drinker ever.

G: No. Never did like beer. The last drink I had was a bottle of sake. The Mexican kid gave me a glass of Sake. That's the last drink of liquor that I ever had.

T: That's sixty years ago…

When you were released from prison camp, and this is really any time after that, how much did you notice dreams or nightmares about your POW experience that you had?

G: Ah…I don't know. I think I was too overcome by other thoughts to dwell much on that. It was more after I got home and lay awake at night and think about it a lot, and then I'd have dreams. But very seldom did I have nightmares. A couple times. A few times.

T: When you had dreams about your POW experience, what images, what things came back to you?

(3, B, 698)

G: Oh, I don't know. *(pauses three seconds)* Bombing. Shelling.

T: That was from before you were a POW then, right?

G: Right.

T: And for our project, I'm wondering if there were any things, any people or experiences from when you were a POW that came in your dreams?

G: No. Not even those that I saw being murdered.

T: So those weren't things that came back in your mind or that you dreamt about?

G: No. Not sleeping.

T: So when you were awake it might come back to your mind, but you don't remember dreaming about that stuff.

G: Practically every night I'd think about it. How close I was…if it had gone another way I wouldn't be here.

T: When you do think like that, how does that make you feel? That you dodged a number of pretty big bullets, figuratively speaking.

G: Well, I don't know why…it…

T: So that question really is something you kind of ask yourself?

G: Yes. There's many, many more worthy. They didn't make it.

T: How does one get past that thought, or don't you?

G: Well, I have a very loving wife, loving children, grandchildren. They all helped me.

T: When your daughters were growing up, sometimes kids just ask questions. Did they ask you much about your POW experience? Your daughters?

G: No. They didn't really. They were involved with their lives. We took them to games. Took them ice skating. Did a lot of skating back in those…

End of Tape 3. Tape 4, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: So it sounds like you really got on with your lives and your POW experience wasn't something that really came up at home?

G: Right.

T: Did they know you had been a POW?

G: Yes. Because we have all kinds of books on it. I had given them all copies of the books. I have three books sitting on the table right now. *Ghost Soldiers.*

T: *Ghost Soldiers.* That's the one by Hampton Sides. So when you read a book like that, you read as someone who remembers that.

When you went back to work…and you worked with—is it Asarko?

G: Yes.

T: And you were a locomotive engineer?

G: Yes.

T: When you worked…and you worked thirty-some years with them?

G: Thirty-six.

T: Did your coworkers know that you had been a POW?

G: Yes. But we hardly ever talked about it. Lots of times when there was nothing else to do we talked about (***).

T: Was that easy for you to talk with your coworkers about what you had been through?

G: It didn't bother me too much at the time.

T: It makes me think…you've written stuff down and this isn't the first interview you've done either. Has it always been easy for you to talk, like we've been talking here, about your POW experience?

G: Most of the time. It depends on how I feel. If I can distance myself from it. But if I get to thinking too hard about it, then becomes real difficult for me to talk about it.

T: That's very interesting. So when you almost look at it and talk about it in a detached way, it's easier.

G: Yes.

T: Is there a part, or parts, of your POW experience that are more difficult to talk about than others?

G: I think thinking of the *Arisan Maru* and executions. Being so close up to them. The brutality of the average Japanese soldier in the Philippines, anyway. It got better. The closer you got to Japan the better it got.

T: So those more violent aspects or the sinking of the *Arisan Maru* are things that are sometimes more difficult than others to talk about.

G: Yes. It depends on, like I say, how I feel. If I'm tired, it probably bothers me more. If I think too much about it.

T: Right. So if I had come to you for this interview in 1980, for example, twenty-five years ago or so, do you think you would have agreed or maybe not?

G: Well, I probably didn't know as much about it then as I do now. At that time I'm not sure I even knew that my officers…I didn't have a manifest of the POWs that were on the ship.

T: So it sounds like…

G: It was just a number.

T: Have you taken a greater interest in your own POW experience then over the last number of years?

G: Yes. I've got a lot more material that I have accumulated. Of course, I've responded to a number of people that have written wanting information about their fathers, brothers, grandfathers or whatever. I never did give them very great detail. I think the military tried to suppress it and not…they don't volunteer anything either.

T: About the *Arisan Maru*.

G: Or any of the prison ships.

T: It remains something that most people know nothing about.

G: That's correct. A guy a couple days ago was going to do some digging for us, and he didn't even know anything about the Bataan Death March.

T: No kidding? How old was this guy? A younger fellow?

G: Well, yes. I suppose he was in his thirties probably.

T: That's interesting stuff. Passing from the kind of collective memory of our society. The last thing I wanted to ask you is this kind of larger question. When you think about your POW experience and about yourself, how did that experience change you as a person do you think?

G: I think… I know one thing. It makes you more—I'm trying to think how I want to say it. *(pauses three seconds)* It makes you a lot more appreciative of what we have, everything we've got. Our food. (***) It makes you aware of food. Especially when you see the waste. You take a bite or two and throw it away in the garbage.

(4, A, 77)

T: So real specific things that you notice different about yourself since you got back.

G: Well, when I first got back loud noises startled me. I had a hard time sleeping in a bed. I hadn't slept in a bed for four years. Sometimes I—when I first got home—I'd sometimes take a blanket and sleep on the step.

T: No kidding?

G: No.

T: The bed was just not something you could get used to right away.

G: Tried to have a piece of plywood in there. (***).

T: What do you think your wife noticed differently about the person that came back in 1945 than the person that left in 1941?

G: Maybe I was quicker to anger about what people do sometimes.

T: Did that gradually go away?

G: Yes. I've mellowed some. With the help of my good wife, children.

T: So your wife had an adjustment too, it sounds like, when you came back.

G: Yes.

T: I meant to ask you, how long was it before she knew that you were alive as a POW? I mean, you were captured in April. How long before she knew you were actually still alive?

G: Not until she got one of those cards from the Red Cross. It should be in here someplace. I think it was in '43 maybe or maybe early '44.

T: So there was a long period of time where she didn't know anything.

G: Right. Other than I was a POW, supposedly.

T: That must have been an enormous psychological stress for her.

G: Yes, but she had good parents and she comes from a fairly large family…brothers and sisters older than she is and several others younger than her. So they helped her through.

T: And she was back in Minnesota for a while, right?

G: Yes.

T: Mr. Oliver, that's the last question I have for today.

END OF PART II OF INTERVIEW

T: Today is 3 November 2004. This is the planned third part of the interview with Mr. Glenn Oliver. The first thing we want to talk about it is you'd like to go back to Cabanatuan briefly. This will be the end of 1942. I'll let you take the story from there.

G: This is a story from the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor. It's on Cabanatuan Camp Number One. It was first occupied by POWs on 1 June 1942. Most of the POWs came from Camp O'Donnell or from Corregidor. I was on the burial detail during the first part of '42 after the bridge building detail broke up and we returned to camp, Cabanatuan Number One.

T: You said that was September of 1942.

G: In 1942, deaths at Cabanatuan Camp Number One—deaths by month and year. For the year of 1942, the first month that the camp was opened, there were 503 deaths. July was 786. August was 287. I either got their—I'd have to look up my dates again…I gave them to you earlier…

T: Yes. It was 26 September, I think.

G: In September there was 262 deaths. October was the same amount, 262. November was 296, and then I left in December, the first part of December. There was 149 deaths. For 1942 there was 2545 deaths at Cabanatuan.

T: The monthly totals you were providing there, that's six, seven, eight, nine people a day.

G: Yes. That's right.

T: So when you talk about being on a burial detail in your experiences earlier, it was a steady amount of people that you were burying on a daily basis.

G: Right. Every day. We'd go out in the morning and dig the grave, common grave, for the deceased, and in the afternoon we'd take them out and put them in the grave and cover them.

T: How many men worked on that grave detail?

G: Well, there's two men to each litter. So I suppose there would be probably anywhere from ten to twenty-five, maybe, or something like that.

T: And how did you get on that detail? Were you selected for it?

G: Yes. They put you on a roster and they picked the healthiest people because it was kind of hard work and you had to carry the body there for maybe a third of a mile. Something like that. To the cemetery [that] we were making.

T: When you're on something like that, does one become just numb to dealing with death every day, or does it get to you after a while?

G: Well, I don't know. It didn't get to me. I didn't like it because I didn't like the hospital odor and guilt…and then bodies were always naked. At that time they were having quite a bit of trouble with flies. They hadn't been able to control flies…that they did later on. They gave prizes for people that would get a milk can full of flies. They got something for turning that in.

T: So the flies were just a part of your everyday life.

G: Right.

T: Were people taken on and off the burial detail? Is this something you could do just a short time, or was it pretty much the same people?

G: I was on it for quite a while. We got what they called a hard work bun. After you came back from burying the dead, each one got a bun made out of rice, I suppose. Rice flour or whatever.

T: So almost a little extra food.

G: Right. But as far as I can remember, I was just on the detail as part of a labor group. I never volunteered for anything.

T: So you could have easily been on—just by being picked—on a different detail.

G: Right. Later on I was on the ration detail.

T: At Cabanatuan Camp Number One?

G: Yes.

T: Was that after the grave digging detail?

G: I don't remember which came first. I can't remember. I'm not sure.

T: What did the ration detail do, specifically?

(4, A, 187)

G: Basically we had to go down to the…near the main gate there was a warehouse down there. And the Filipinos would deliver sacks of rice there periodically and store it there. Then we'd have to go down there escorted by Jap soldiers and each one of us would get a sack of rice to carry back to the camp—it was, I don't know, maybe somewhere between a quarter and a half mile—and distribute it to the various kitchens.

T: How big were these bags of rice? How heavy were they? Can you recall?

G: I think were supposed to weigh around ninety pounds.

T: So for men in your condition, that's a lot of weight.

G: Yes. Especially when we were not in condition for carrying. Later on when I was in Japan working for—stevedoring—I was more or less a lightweight.

T: You mentioned those were much heavier than this.

G: Yes. Depending on what kind of grain you're carrying. What we called kivi—which was another kind of grain, can't remember the regular name for it. But that weighed about 120 pounds to the sack. A little larger sack. Heavier grain.

T: That's a lot of weight to be carrying even when one is healthy and in good shape.

G: Yes. Then we had to…I mean, it wasn't just one time. That was continuous. You'd load a freight car with grain like that. There would be a number of us carrying. Usually about ten, twelve, fifteen maybe. Whatever was available for that detail.

T: Right. It could be a different number of men at different times, you mean.

G: Yes.

T: Let me move to October of 1944. At that point, with the Japanese clearly on the defensive in the war, you were one of thousands being swept up into and onto any kind of ship that would float in order to be transported to Japan.

G: That's correct.

T: It was at Manila, according to your account and also some research that I did…

G: Yes.

T: You and 1781 other POWs, by the record, were put aboard the *Arisan Maru*. At that point were there rumors among the men about how dangerous it was to be on those ships headed for Japan?

G: Well, I think we were all well aware that there was a hazard there because we knew from information we were getting from the Filipinos that things were going badly for the Japanese. Also Manila had been air raided. In fact, while I was in Bilibid Prison there waiting for whatever was going to come in the future, I believe one person was wounded by strafing from an American plane. They were dive bombing various targets in Manila.

T: So the time you were at Bilibid—and from the record, that was September 1 to October 10, 1944—you could sense the war getting closer, in a way.

G: Oh, yes. We knew that because the later details that were coming into Bilibid…we no longer had to work. Those necessary details for maintaining Bilibid camp…

T: For you, can you recall in your mind, the thought of going to Japan? What kind of feeling did that fill you with?

G: I really don't recall. I probably didn't like it. Most everybody wanted to stay in the Philippines because we figured we had a much better chance of recovery by military forces.

(4, A, 255)

T: And being in Japan would put you that much further away from that.

G: Right. Not only that, [but also] the hazard of ocean travel.

T: The ship, when you got on board the *Arisan Maru*, [is a] medium sized freighter. How do you remember the actual getting on the ship there? Were there simply a lot of men at the dock all at one time or was it a little more ordered than that?

G: We were marched down there. They counted us off earlier in the morning. About mid-morning, I would guess. Everybody was given an extra ration of rice to take with you. We marched from Bilibid down to Pier Seven. The freighter was laying alongside the dock. The port side of the ship was snugged up to the wharf, to the dock. As I recall it, there was two gangplanks. There was a main gangplank up near the number one and number two hatches, which would be forward of the superstructure. The smaller gangplank, which I noticed back amidships closer to where you would go up to get into the superstructure, the cabins.

T: So two different gangplanks that were set up.

G: Right. And the POWs were marched up there. I can't remember whether we went…it seemed like we went in single file up the gangplank. But they had congestion up on the deck. So they had to hold up the line. I was standing at the bottom of the gangplank; there was a Japanese officer there. Several. One of them had a sheaf of papers. I think all he was doing was counting, because none of us had to give a name or anything like that. I think he was just counting. That's what you usually did, was go by numbers. So many men. Keep track of them that way.

While I was standing there, some kind of an officer came off the ship down the narrow gangplank by the superstructure, and he came over to where the captain was standing with the roster detail sheet or whatever it was, manifest. He was pretty irate and upset when he looked at all the men that were coming on board his ship. I believe he asked the Japanese officer how many men were going to be coming on that were POWs. The Japanese told him—he gave it in Japanese of course—and I counted *(counts in Japanese)*, anyway, I figured that out as 1860…it was either sixty-seven or sixty-nine. I used both those figures. He turned around and went back on the ship.

T: So from what you observed, he seemed surprised that the plans were to bring that many men on board the ship.

G: Yes. He didn't want that many people. He didn't think he had capacity for them, I believe. Of course, we were really crowded in the hold.

T: When you went down to the hold, was it on a ladder or a rope ladder? How did you get down?

G: I'm not sure. I can't remember. That's one of the things I can't remember. One of the other POWs, Lang I think, said it was kind of a stairway into the hold.

T: So something fixed, as opposed to something that would be temporary.

G: I think they'd hauled troops before in that ship. So to make it easier to get in and out, I think they had kind of a staircase at the side where they'd go up and down into the hold. Because there was three tiers for sleeping in the hold.

T: Was there one large hold for everyone, or were there separate holds, that you recall?

G: It was just the one hold that I was in. The two holds are separated from each other by a steel bulkhead.

T: So there were two holds total and you were in, obviously, in one of them.

G: Yes. I think I was in number two. Thinking back and remembering how the curvature of the steel hull was. I don't think I was in the forward hold which would be more sloped.

T: Now you described sleeping tiers.

G: Right. I was on the bottom. They crowded you in. The Japanese soldiers down there with rifles, they would hit you with the butt of the rifle or jab you. Because I was near the front of the column, they pushed us over to the far side of the ship hold, which would be the starboard side, and they started filling up the bottom tier first. Actually it wasn't a tier. It was planks of the deck, of the hold. I was about the first one in, so I went clear to the back end and they crowded you in. Later on I counted the number of men we had in that area. It was nineteen men. I was next to the steel side of the ship [and] I think we were below the waterline, so it was a little bit cooler there, which made it a little more tolerable for us. I think the higher…

End of Tape 4, Side A. Side B begins at counter 383.

T:…the temperature down on the ship, did it get hot pretty quickly?

G: Yes, it did. You get that many bodies crowded into a hold that has no air ventilation, like blowers or anything like that, in the tropics—Manila is only seventeen or fifteen degrees north of the equator. I think it's fifteen degrees north of the equator.

T: So it quickly got hot down there.

G: Right.

T: Once everyone was on board the ship, did the ship get underway right away, that you recall?

G: It did [get underway] that evening. After dark. We left. The men that were in the center of the hold were able to observe stars, and there were enough Navy men and officers that knew navigation [and they] determined that instead of sailing north toward Japan, we were going south. We sailed for a couple days and then pulled into a cove or a small bay or someplace and stayed there for three, four days.

T: So the ship was not moving.

G: Right. We were even closer to the equator. Then we turned around and came back to Manila, and that would be October 20. They took on water and sacks of rice. Then we left that night. That time when we cleared the harbor we started going north.

T: By that time you'd been on the ship for nine days already. Can you talk about the conditions down in the hold? How did things develop down there during those nine days?

G: In the area I was in it was pretty well organized. Everybody just, as I recall, more or less stayed in place. There was no place to go. There was no need to go anyplace. All you did was generate turmoil and build up heat. It was a lot easier just to stay there in the semi-darkness and sweat it out.

T: Did some people handle that kind of stressful, cramped condition better than others?

G: Yes. I think I did [handle the stressful situation] it much better than a lot of them. Although in my area I don't recall anybody being…losing control. I crawled out of there once. I had to go to the bathroom. They had buckets in the center. Five gallon buckets to use to defecate in. Urinate. They hauled them up on a rope and dumped them over the side. I can remember leaving that area once. Crawl on my hands and knees and the guys that I had to crawl over. They helped me. They placed my knee so I wouldn't stick it down on some part of their body that would hurt. You were looking for a place to put your hands and knees.

The deck above us was…they had planks, stringers, that supported the planks for the deck above us. If you were sitting one of those stringers you could not sit upright. You had to bend over. Bend your head over. But if you weren't under one of those stringers, you could sit up without bumping your head on any planks that supported the deck above you. There was a sleeping deck above us that had the same amount of headroom. Then the third deck above that was right underneath the steel deck.

T: How do you pass the time in conditions like that?

G: I don't know [how I passed the time]. I can't remember really. You're semi-starved so you're not very active. About the only thing that's working in your body is your brain. You think about stuff. Some guys would talk about food. That was a common pastime.

T: Yours too?

(4, B, 437)

G: Probably. I don't recall, but I probably did. That was a big thing in our lives.

T: I know from the record that the *Arisan Maru* left Manila with a number of other ships heading for Japan. Were you aware of the fact that other ships were sailing with yours?

G: No. I wasn't. I think some of the men that were on deck that were doing the cooking knew about it and passed the information.

T: Over a couple of days there the convoy was attacked by American submarines, and a number of ships were sunk before yours. Could you hear any of that down where you were?

G: No. I didn't [hear anything]. All I heard was the guys running back and forth on the sealed deck up above. Some of them must have been wearing those hobnailed shoes that were a favorite of the Japanese. Military shoes…boots. Then a tremendous explosion. Then I thought they were going to fire a cannon off the deck or something like that.

T: Is that what it sounded like from your perspective?

G: That's what I first thought. Then the ship stopped. The engines. The ship stopped. The propellers stopped. Then there was another explosion just about as bad as the first one.

T: Did those explosions shake the ship as well?

G: Yes. It shuddered.

T: Did the explosions…did people start to get, including yourself, nervous or worried about what was happening?

G: I wasn't [worried], because I thought they were shooting a gun off from the deck. That's what it sounded like to me. It sounded like maybe they were firing at some object. I don't know.

T: How soon did it become apparent that that wasn't what it was?

G: Oh, I don't know. I suppose over a half an hour. I think the Japanese had a chance…or time to abandon ship, and they secured the hatches and abandoned ship. Finally, somebody got up on deck and then we found the ship was deserted. I finally got out. Because where I was, I was one of the last people to get out of the hold.

T: Because you were way down at the bottom.

G: I was at the bottom, and I was way on the far side.

T: Was the ship listing at all or beginning to sink, or was it just dead in the water?

G: It was dead in the water. It didn't seem to be listing. It probably was sinking slowly by the stern, because after I got up on deck I walked down the port side past the superstructure, the narrow deck space there between the superstructure and the railing, and behind the superstructure you could look down inside the ship. It was torn open by a torpedo. It was all the way across. From one side to the other. There was water running back and forth in the bottom. The deck was peeled back

eight, ten feet across. There was no deck there. Just peeled back. It was so close to the back of the superstructure you couldn't cross over to the other side.

T: At this time you mention yourself being on deck. Were all the other prisoners also just wandering around the ship or on top of the ship?

G: Right. A lot of them were [on deck], but the majority of them seemed to be in the water and swimming to the stern…back toward the [Japanese] destroyer.

T: Japanese destroyer.

G: Right.

T: So a number of men, from what you could see, had left the ship already.

G: Quite a few. A solid mass of them swam from the prison ship towards the destroyer.

(4, B, 489)

T: How did you decide what to do, Mr. Oliver?

G: Well, I didn't think it was…I couldn't see anybody being picked up. Even if they could, they couldn't accommodate that many people. Knowing the Japanese, I knew they weren't going to bother. You were just wasting your effort trying to get on the destroyer like that. So I just stayed on the ship. I told my buddy…

T: Who were you with at this time?

G: Walt—and I'm trying to think of his name. I'd have to look up the roster to get his last name. He was German heritage with a German name.

T: So the two of you were on deck. Did you kind of make a decision, a conscious decision, about what to do or not really?

G: I told him I was going to stay on the ship until the thing was ready to go under. I don't know what he was going to do. He had a canteen and we got fresh water and drank water because we were dehydrated. After we got through, he gave me his canteen. He said, "I won't need this." I filled it about half full of water and filled another one about half full of water and hooked them on, one on each side of my gunbelt. I had a gunbelt. Canvas.

T: Canteens.

G: I don't know where he went.

T: So he was not with you when you actually got into the water.

G: No. I don't know where he went or what he did. Maybe he went overboard or…[I don't know] what happened to him. But we stayed on the ship, I would guess, for probably an hour maybe.

T: So the ship was sinking, but very slowly.

G: Very slowly. And every time a wave would go underneath the ship, the back end of the ship would wobble up and down and you could hear steel tearing and squealing, ripping apart. All of a sudden it [stern] snapped off and sank.

T: The back…the stern part.

G: Yes. Then when it did that, it must have opened up passages into the other part of the ship, the part of the ship that I was on, and it started to sink quite rapidly. I think it only lasted maybe fifteen minutes or something like that.

T: Were men on that stern section when it sunk?

G: No. As far as I know there was no POWs on the stern section. The only way you could get onto it would be to go down inside the ship itself and then try to get over to the other side and it was full of water. No reason.

T: How high were the seas? The waves at this point.

G: I guess they [waves] were pretty good size. Big sloping waves. But it didn't seem to be windy. I mean, I can't remember any whitecaps. We had had a bad storm, I guess. We were on the end of it.

T: So you stayed on the deck until you had to leave, it sounds like.

G: Yes. When the ship got to the point that the railing was only five or six feet above water I went over the side. Went over the side and lowered myself into the water and swam a couple hundred feet away and turned around and watched the ship sink. Once it sank, it was getting almost time for the sun to set and you could see men still on the ship. Some were hanging onto the rails. Some were sitting down. As the ship sank…the more it sank, the more vertical it got until it was almost entirely vertical. There was probably fifteen, twenty feet of the bow still sticking out of the water. Then it just plunged out of sight. Shortly after that a big geyser of water and air and debris came up like a waterspout.

T: With you in the water now, are you treading water? Do you have a life jacket?

(4, B, 550)

G: I had those two canteens. They were about half full of air.

T: So that gave some buoyancy.

G: Some buoyancy. I don't know. I looked at the life jackets. Everybody could have one if you wanted one. But they didn't look like they were any good. I don't think I took one. I was from Minnesota, so I was a good swimmer. I used to go out a mile on some of the lakes back home.

T: Here you are in the middle of the South China Sea. Did you have any idea of what you were going to do?

G: No. I was just going to paddle around; and [I] bumped into some planks that came up from the ship. So I thought well, gather up some lumber to help me float. So I think I got about three long planks. Piled them one on top of each other and a couple of short boards. I found a couple of kegs that had Japanese rice straw rope on them. I undid the knots and took the rope underneath my gunbelt, and I kept getting bumped around with debris. So I sat to wait in it and then I got violently sick.

T: Like seasick? Or like vomiting?

G: Both. I had diarrhea and vomited. I had eaten some half-cooked rice, and I suppose I ate too much and drank too much water. When I got through I was pretty well cleaned out. I was pretty weak. So I put my chest up on top of the planks and hung my arms over the side and I must have…I don't know what happened. I don't remember anything.

T: So you fell asleep or passed out it sounds like.

G: Evidently. I don't know. I would guess I went to sleep, but I don't know.

T: With all the men that must have got into the water, was anybody around you or were you pretty much by yourself?

G: I chose to be by myself. There was a large group of men that stayed together. You could hear them calling to each other, giving each other encouragement. Somebody had one of these sergeant's whistle and periodically he would blow it. Of course, this was at night. When I would go up on a big wave I could hear them. Then when I would go down into the drain a ways, then I couldn't hear them.

T: Did you spend the night on the planks then by yourself?

G: Yes. The next thing I knew it was daylight and I looked around and there wasn't anybody in sight and I couldn't hear anybody. As far as I knew I was the only one there. So I started to fix these planks, tie them together with this rope so I could sit

on it so I would be more out of the water. Up until then I was in the water, and I was getting cold and water-soaked. So that's what I did.

T: I'm thinking about how or whether…you thought about…you were optimistic about this working out or were you kind of down in the dumps and pessimistic about your chances?

G: I don't know. I can't remember [if I was optimistic or pessimistic at this point]. I suppose I was doing what's normal. Trying to survive. Try to extend your life as long as you can. You struggle to survive.

T: Without thinking really rationally about the odds.

G: Right. Make it today and see what happens tomorrow.

T: I know you mentioned a Japanese destroyer a little bit ago that was in the area. Did that ship leave or did you ever see it again?

G: I think it was the same one, but I'm not sure. The next morning, I had assembled my planks and was sitting on them, but they weren't enough support. I was still immersed in water up to my waist. But at least I could sit up. This destroyer—I thought it was a cruiser at first. When I first talked about it, I called it a cruiser because I'm not familiar with Navy ships. Of course, they looked pretty big to me. But anyway, it bore down on me. They were going very slowly. I had a short board, like for a paddle.

(4, B, 622)

T: This was daylight, so you could see the ship coming.

G: Oh, yes. It was headed directly for me. So when it bumped me with the bow, I pushed real hard against the boat with my short board and I went away from the destroyer probably at about a forty-five degree angle. Then that's where the destroyer, which is quite long, saw me and finally there was what looked like a…like the Navy men stood in formation. Because they were all in a line on the deck.

T: They were so close you could see them.

G: Oh, yes. Heck, they were only twenty-five, thirty feet from me.

T: And they did or didn't see you?

G: They saw me. One of them threw a—he was the last one in line. He was sucking on an orange. He threw it at me.

T: So they definitely saw you.

G: Oh, yes.

T: And just left you there.

G: Right. They went down a ways and made a real hard turn to port, to the left, and steamed out of sight. Then shortly after that somebody hollered at me.

T: In English.

G: Right. That was Shell Brodsky. Asked if he could come over. I said, "Sure. Come on ahead."

T: Now Brodsky had been on the *Arisan Maru* as well.

G: Yes.

T: Did you know him?

G: No.

T: So here's just a chance meeting in the middle of the South China Sea of the two of you.

G: Right.

T: What transpired once you and he, in a sense, linked up?

G: Well, we put his plank…added it to the two or three that I had, and sat there the rest of the day. Saving our strength and not knowing what to do. Towards evening, it was just starting to get dark again…

T: This would be on the twenty-fifth, so one day later.

G: Yes. Twenty-four hours later. He had told me that he had been sitting on the deck of the ship. He was going to go down with it and he did. He said he went down but when the ship exploded from trapped air and that being compressed in the hull as it sank…blew it apart or whatever, he bobbed to the top. He said he broke his hand from some of the debris.

T: How was the weather by this time? I mean, you mentioned some waves earlier. Is it about the same?

G: About the same, except that at night the wind started to come up and the waves are getting bigger, and my rice rope was coming all apart. Planks were going to come apart. So we were going to split the planks. Each one take half of them and

see what happened. Just about that time I looked over my left shoulder and I spotted four life rafts. They were water-logged. Tied together in a string.

T: And no people attached to them.

G: No. No. They had been in the water for some time. Like if you take a two by four and lay it on the edge and then use flooring…tongue and groove. Put a bottom on it and then fill it with some flotation material. I suppose it was cork. I don't know. Then put a top on it the same way.

T: So these things were better to be on than the planks you thought, or not?

(4, B, 692)

G: Oh, yes. Even though they…you could lay down on it. Even though you would be wet. They were about five, six inches thick. Two by four like width. Three quarter inch flooring top and bottom. They were water-logged. But they were large enough so you could lay down on it, which was a lot easier than trying to sit on the plank. So I swam over to the first one and Brodsky swam to the second. We each took one and we rested a while. Then I told him maybe we can get one of these life rafts on top of the other one and maybe we can get out of the water. So that's what we did. We stacked two of them on top of the one I was on and we tried to get the rafts…the fourth one…we were too weak. We couldn't get it up. So we spent the night that way. The next morning we were able to get the fourth life raft on top. Then with the sun drying the life rafts, they kept floating higher and higher.

T: One thing that occurred to me is that you have a limited amount of fresh water and you've got no food.

G: I forgot to tell you. That night…when I woke up in the morning both my canteens were gone. They had torn loose during the night or whatever.

T: So you had no water.

G: No water. Still had the gun belt and the rope. Japanese rice rope. But no canteens. They were gone.

T: At this point you're far from land and you're without food and water. How did you discuss with Brodsky really what you were going to do?

G: I don't know if I did or not. Guess just let nature take its course. We were either going to live or die. There wasn't anything we could do to help ourselves much. I did have a small—what you call it…one of those little—like a knife. I used to keep it in the hem of my shorts. Had a blade maybe two inches long. A penknife. Didn't have a handle on it. Just an outline for it. Push on a button and slide it out and lock

it in place. Real flimsy and small penknife. When I was laying on the raft there. There was a bunch of little fish…

End of Tape 4. Tape 5, Side A starts at counter 000.

T:…in a boat or in a raft or just swim by or…

G: No. They were just swimming around underneath the raft in the daytime. I took the knife blade and I took the tongue and groove boards, real straight grain, and I would slit part of the tongue off so it made a shaft about a quarter inch in diameter and I took…I had a (***) made out of a GI blanket with cloth pleat sewed into it. On there was some of the thread at the bottom where it wasn't hemmed. I tied that knife blade onto that. Cut notches in the stick and tied the knife blade onto the end of the stick. So I had a stick about three foot long. I'd lay on my belly and stab those little fish swimming around.

T: Did you get any?

G: Nope. Eventually my knife fell off.

T: Did you and Brodsky, a man you didn't know, did you talk to each other at all?

G: Yes. I suppose we did. Can't really remember any of the conversations. I don't think they were…one thing we said, we agreed not to discourage each other. We'd both read horror stories and stuff like that.

T: Where in desperate situations one person turning on the other, you mean.

G: Right.

T: And so it occurred to both of you to talk about that.

G: Yes. We both agreed no matter what, nothing like that would happen.

T: That's interesting how you foresee what could possibly happen in a situation like that.

(5, A, 23)

G: I did a lot of reading, and I used to read a lot of adventure back home. While we were on the…at night evidently…I don't know whether those little fish were being attacked or what…but in the morning when I woke up I found a dead fish laying between Brodsky and myself. Probably three inches long. I showed it to him. I said, "We'll share it." I took and bit off what I considered about half of its body. The head end. I figured that was desirable. I chewed it up slowly and swallowed it and gave

him the other half. The next night during the night another little fish committed suicide and he got the head end.

T: It doesn't sound very appetizing, but it sounds fair.

G: At least we shared. I could have taken it all myself. Anyway, another thing I did. When we were tying the rafts together on top of each other there was a piece of gauze snagged into the rope. I pulled that loose and rolled it up into a ball, about the size of a pea I guess, something like that. I put it in my mouth. As a Boy Scout we used to learn to take a pebble and keep it in your mouth because it would promote saliva.

T: Did it work?

G: Worked for me. My mouth and lips were in a lot better shape than his.

T: Yes. Because the sun during the day has got to be punishing.

G: It was. Boy! When we were on that other prison ship in the harbor there in Formosa, skin was coming off us in sheets. I got a good thump on the back because the guards were on the hatch cover and they kept us on the hatch cover day and night. Down at night. We had to get down off the hatch cover in between the (***).

T: It was twenty-eighth, so four days after the ship was torpedoed, that you were picked up out of the water by the Japanese.

G: Yes.

T: Now, we've talked about the story from that point forward. I'm wondering, in the water there when you saw a ship, you saw the destroyer, did you decide to flag the ship down regardless of whose it was?

G: He's the one that saw the ship. Actually, I think he saw smoke on the horizon. I suppose it was zigzagging back and forth and finally it got where he could see the hull and he had a white shirt with long sleeves. He stood up. I was too weak. I sat and he told me about it. I did sit up and I could see the ship in the distance. He stood up and waved that white shirt back and forth. They steamed up to where we were and slowly stopped. I lay on the life raft there. I was too weak to get up. I was almost beyond the point where I was thinking.

T: You had been a number of days without food or water and then with the sun.

G: He had already left the life raft and swam over to the Jacob's ladder and climbed the ladder. They helped him up the ladder. I suppose he told me come on or something like that. I don't know. But he left.

T: So he was in better physical shape than you. At least as far as strength.

G: Yes. Then I was still hanging on the raft and they had thrown a ring buoy into the water between the raft and the destroyer. I laid there a little longer trying to decide if I was going to help myself to get to that ring buoy. Going in the water I was so sunburned I didn't want to get my face down in the water. I dogpaddled over to the ring and I tried to lift it up and put it over my head so I could put my arms down and be inside it. I couldn't lift it up high enough to do that. So I hung onto it and went underwater and came up inside it and put my arms over the side of the buoy and they towed me over to the Jacob's ladder. I tried to climb the ladder and I couldn't make it. Got about halfway up out of the water and would fall back into the water. So then they pulled me over alongside the ladder and dragged me up the side of the destroyer until they could reach down and grab me and pull me up.

T: One is tempted to think, you know, you'd be relieved to be rescued, but on the other hand, you've just been rescued by the Japanese. Do you remember sorting that out at the time between those two…that kind of issue?

(5, A, 86)

G: No. Just wanted to get out of the raft.

T: So being recaptured by the Japanese was at least off the raft and out of the water.

G: Right. Never gave it a second thought. Just thankful someone stopped and picked us up.

T: Sounds, from the way you described your condition, you may not have lasted much longer in the water.

G: I figured maybe one more day. If that. I was just about done in. I mean, I was having a hard time thinking. Wasn't hallucinating that I recall. But just [at] the point where I couldn't do anything.

T: You and Philip Brodsky had a couple days and then on the destroyer too…he was on the destroyer with you then, right?

G: Yes.

T: Once you got back to the States—I mean after the war was over—did you and he stay in touch with each other?

G: No.

T: So your experience together in the water was something that didn't build any kind of a post-war friendship at all.

G: No.

T: In the years since the end of the war, you've been asked to tell or talk about the story of the *Arisan Maru* more than once, right?

G: Yes.

T: Is that something that gets easier or more difficult as you talk about it again and again?

G:I suppose it gets a little easier. You have kind of a story line and it's kind of repetitious. You kind of go through it kind of fast. Getting all the information available.

T: Having talked about it a number of times, I appreciate you being willing to include it in the interview you've done with me, so I'll thank you for that. That was the only subject we agreed to talk about this evening and because we have the story forward—from the time you got on the Japanese destroyer. We took the story through the end of the war. I will turn the machine off.

END OF INTERVIEW